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#67

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

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STEVE FABIAN

UP FRONT

Lots of people combine their talents to make a comic book. The writer, penciller and inker are, by far, the most visible of them. Still, without the help of the others, there would be no comics as we know them. Who am I talking about? Letterers and editors, of course! (Yes, DAK, publishers are important, too, but everyone already **knows** how important they are!)

Without a doubt, the most overlooked people in comics are letterers. Why? Because the better they are, the less you tend to notice them! Crisp, clean, clear lettering is the signature of a good letterer. Until you read a comic lettered by a poor letterer, you can easily forget what a major contribution letterers make. If it's a strain just to read the comic, chances are you won't finish the book nor bother to buy it any more.

Now, what about those strange people called editors . . . ? Editing involves much more than just making sure the writer spells everything correctly. The editor's job begins when the writer comes to him with the barest of plot ideas (many times, it's the **editor** who goes to the writer with the plot ideas). He listens to what the writer wants to do with the story, contributes ideas for directions to take it, and basically just helps the writer brainstorm it. He looks over the finished plot, offering suggestions if there are places it can be improved and compliments on the places where it is well done (and writers love to get compliments — trust me on this one). He looks the artwork over carefully to make sure it's the best it can be and, when called for, once again offers compliments and criticisms. Finally, he goes over the actual script, making sure the characters are in character, making sure everything is presented clearly for the reader, basically making sure the story will come out as the author originally intended. For a beginning writer such as me, **David Kraft** and **Dwight Zimmerman** have been invaluable to my development! I feel my work is improving steadily with each issue of X-THIEVES and SOUTHERN KNIGHTS, and I have these two stalwarts to thank for it.

That's all for now! But remember — don't be too hasty to attribute **all** the success of a comic book to the writer and artists!

— Henry Vogel

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"I did enjoy being *the* CONAN writer."

ROY THOMAS

Adaptation from one medium to another is inevitable, it is a tradition which goes to the very roots of storytelling, a practice that perhaps predates known history. It is also a difficult and risky undertaking, for the adaptation will certainly be compared with the original, its omissions bemoaned, its inference questioned, its modifications vilified.

Such is the way of things that adaptation is often considered a lesser or separate creativity, and so it has been that in comic books adaptation has often been relegated to some unimportant status. But possibly this is a false perception, for there are many factors involved, from those persons given the job, their knowledge and experience, to the support they are given, to the audience they reach, to the original material, itself and its natural audience, and so on — and there have definitely been exceptions to the rule.

And Roy Thomas's CONAN is the most notable. Adapted from the incredible tales penned by Robert E. Howard — who together with Edgar Rice Burroughs and H.P. Lovecraft is considered one of the

Frank Frazetta's cover painting for R.E.H.'s THE BARBARIAN (1974).

All artwork accompanying this interview is © 1989 Marvel Entertainment Group, unless otherwise noted.

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"I took home *Conan the Adventurer*, which was the first one to

foremost American fantasy writers of the 20th century — Marvel Comics' CONAN THE BARBARIAN did what few other mainstream comics during the '70s could, it thrived without a superhero, and it was an adaptation to boot. What was the secret of this success? Let's see if we can find out. . .

LOU MOUGIN: *What was the first Howard story or book you read, and do you have any idea when?*

ROY THOMAS: Well, there are two answers to that. When the books first started coming out, the CONAN books from Lancer Books, and I think KULL was very close to that, in 1965, '66, '67, I was attracted to them. I had not *heard* of Conan; I had probably seen the name here and there but it had never made any impression, either Conan or **Robert E. Howard.** But I was attracted by, to a lesser extent later by the **Krenkel** cover for the KULL book, but in particular by the **Frazetta** cover. **Frazetta** of course, a couple of years earlier, while I had still been a teacher, started doing covers for the **Burroughs** books that Ace was coming out with, and also for other things of that sort; and I knew **Frazetta,** his work in comics and other places over the years.

So I picked them up because it was a very interesting looking character even if it wasn't the necessarily the kind of thing that I ordinarily read. I took home CONAN THE ADVENTURER, which was the first one to come out, and I read the first few pages — after reading the blurbs about this ancient adventurer from the days after Atlantis sank and so forth — and I think I had in mind that it would be a little bit more savage version of a JOHN CARTER OF MARS kind of thing, so after a few pages it really didn't grab me because I was looking for something that was a little closer to science fiction.

LOU: *More Burroughsian, in other words.*

ROY: Yeah, more Burroughsian. So I put it down and I did not pick up that or any other CONAN book to read again. I was vaguely interested in KING KULL since that name had *also* been used for a Captain Marvel villain in the '50s, and now I was beginning to see from the copyright dates that this may have been the place that **Otto Binder** picked it up from. *(Laughter.)* But again, I didn't read that either. I had a couple of the books for the covers, thinking maybe one of these days I would read them — I didn't even buy them all — so they just kind of laid around in a box.

Then the material obviously began to catch on, **Tolkien** was out there by that time, and I saw all of these things coming out from Ace and Lancer, **Steranko** started doing covers for a couple of them around that time, and by 1969 readers were writing in to say, "Why don't you do some of the CONAN and **Robert E. Howard** material?" They were writing us about **Robert E. Howard;** they were writing us about **Burroughs,** which we tried to acquire at the time, and eventually were able to; they were writing us about **Tolkien,** which we tried to acquire and were unable to do so; and there were a

Conan by the late Roy G. Krenkel.

© 1969 Roy G. Krenkel

come out, and read the first few pages. It really didn't grab me."

couple of other items here and there, DOC SAVAGE which Marvel did eventually acquire. So in many ways it was the old case of the readers telling you what you should be doing, so I got interested — still without having read *any* of the material. Strangely enough the first thing that I ever read in that vein was something that was half **Burroughs**, half **Howard**, which was **Lin Carter**'s book THONGOR AND THE WIZARD OF LEMURIA; which *also* had a **Frazetta** cover, which by a weird coincidence I ended up owning several years later — the one with the barbarian flying on the back of a pterodactyl above a mountain of volcanic lava.

LOU: *I've heard that in fact Marvel was thinking about doing THONGOR first instead of CONAN.*

ROY: Yeah, we were in negotiations with **Lin Carter**, whom I had met a few times because he lived in New York. I don't remember all of the details now, but basically his agent, I think **Henry Morrison,** was sort of giving the thing back burner treatment and was not too enthusiastic — though Lin himself was — and we became kind of impatient. You know, it just looked like he wasn't interested in the relatively *small* amount of money we were going to pay, and it was sort of a stand off. Perhaps I could have gone to Lin and broken the stand off.

And then one night I stopped in a paperback bookstore and saw again some CONAN books on the stand — as of course you did all of the time in those days — and I picked one up and for the first time really, as I recall, I glanced at the introduction that was written be **deCamp,** who of course had written some of the stories and finished others and edited them and had really been responsible in many ways for getting them into print. I noticed that it mentioned **Glenn Lord** as the agent for the **Robert E. Howard** estate, and gave his address because he published a fanzine called THE HOWARD COLLECTOR. So I just contacted Glenn, not knowing whether he or **deCamp** or whoever should be contacted, and we very quickly came to a deal for, you know, a relatively small amount of money — but it of course led on to other things.

And somehow I managed to talk **Martin Goodman,** who was the publisher of Marvel, into doing it; I wrote a memo two or three pages long detailing why this would be a good thing to do even though it did not meet his usual criteria for the books. It had all of these things against it, you know, of looking like it was of another time and things of this sort, so I detailed the things that would be *good* about it, that would be possibly potentially commercial about it over and above the fact that it was published in paperback — which wouldn't have made much difference to him — and he authorized me to pay a certain very small amount of money. I upped it a little bit when I made the offer to **Glenn Lord,** figuring I'd write the first issue or so in order to get the thing off to a start and could pay the extra money out of my own pocket if I *had* to, and I don't know if **Goodman** forgot what he had authorized me to offer or *what* but I never had to pay the extra money out. *(Laughter.)* And I told people I would write the first issue or so and then turn it

Red Sonja (Sonya) by Roy G. Krenkel.

© 1980 Roy G. Krenkel

"I told people I would write the first (*Conan*) issue or so then

over to someone else, then of course I stayed through thousands of pages, 115 issues of just the color comic, until I left Marvel itself temporarily in 1980. *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *Well, I did appreciate CONAN back in the late 1970s, it was one of the few titles I could always count on to have a good story. You couldn't say that in that time for that many comics, sad to say.*

ROY: Yeah. I had a lot of fun with it. One of the things that I enjoyed was reading some of these stories, even *other* stories, CONAN type stories, and bringing that into it. We didn't have the rights to **deCamp** or **Carter** stories until much later, and therefore we sometimes did alternative versions to cover the same incidents. Later it got a little confusing when we got the rights to *all* of the stories. But one of the things that bothers me sometimes is that whenever I see references to that material, some people somehow *always* automatically assume that everything that was done then was an adaptation. Even some stories that were nominated for professional awards, like the sixth issue, "Devil-Wings Over Shadizar," and several others —

LOU: *Those were your originals.*

ROY: Yeah. It's always bothered me that some people have assumed that *all* of the stories were adapted from **Robert E. Howard** originals. A CONAN story that isn't adapted from a **Robert E. Howard** story is no more an adaptation than say somebody doing the latest issue of SUPERMAN or SPIDER-MAN or something would be an adaptation simply because he's using a character that somebody else had already created; if everything that I did with Conan was an adaptation then so was everything that's been done with Superman and Batman and Spider-Man since the first story.

LOU: *Right. So you got the rights and then started creating the book, and at first wasn't John Buscema supposed to be the CONAN artist?*

ROY: Yes. John was not familiar with **Robert E. Howard** as such, but he liked

From Barry Smith's 1st CONAN portfolio.

© 1989 The Gorblimey Press/Barry Smith

turn it over to someone else, then I stayed thru 1000's of pages."

that *kind* of material and so he was a logical choice for it. But he turned out to be out of our price range. *(Laughter.)* **Martin Goodman** wanted to get back that relatively minuscule amount of money that we were paying to the estate at the time — it's since gone up of course — and therefore **Buscema** was out, and so were a couple of other people who might have been available at the time, like **Jack Kirby.** And I was familiar with **Barry Smith's** work because he had done a few stories for Marvel; and he'd done some things that had not been printed, which were drawings of Kull and Thongor type characters, because we had been thinking of trying to do some things in paperback around that time — that didn't come off but later the drawings were mostly printed. So of the people available to me at the lower end of the rate scale there was Barry, who was back living in England and not really *doing* anything for us then, as the logical choice.

I knew he could handle it. It took him a couple of issues to get the *range*, maybe it was partly the stories, but primarily it just took a while because somehow he kind of froze up I think, being there where he couldn't really talk to us and so forth. It was hard to get feedback, so for the first issue, "The Coming of Conan," he had some nice things here and there, yet in between there a lot of things didn't work too well.

LOU: *He was just getting started, in other words.*

ROY: Yeah. It was actually work that was not *nearly* as good as some other drawings that he had done before. Even the second issue, "Lair of the Beast-Men" — which was also an original; and it worked out quite well and was nominated by the professional group we had back then as one of the five best stories of the year — that was very strange because I had written it with a bunch of real apemen who were based on a sentence or two in a **Howard** essay, and Barry took the fairly detailed synopsis and made them much more civilized so they looked like something out of **Edgar Rice Burroughs** or PLANET OF THE APES. *(Laughter.)* I thought it was very interesting in its own right, it worked well, but it was not really CONAN yet; it wasn't what **Robert E. Howard** had intended, it wasn't what I had intended.

But then right after that we began to hit our stride, primarily because then Barry did a couple of adaptations of stories, starting with #3, "Twilight of the Grim Grey God" — some of those early issues, by the way, were not published in the order

The original "unpublished" cover for AVENGERS #66 (art: Barry Smith & Sid Shores), 1969.

in which Barry did them, he actually did #4 before he did #3, which was an adaptation of one the **Robert E. Howard** non CONAN stories. So it was actually the fourth story, but they weren't published in the right order, in which Barry worked with "Tower of the Elephant" in adaptation. He'd been reading the stories as he went along but he hadn't been *adapting* them, it isn't quite the same thing. He'd just be reading them for general inspiration, but then he began to *actually* read through the material and then see it in his mind on *top* of — and I want to stress this because sometimes people will assume that I just gave Barry the stories, the **Robert E. Howard** stories, and he *went* with them — the detailed plot I sent along with it of how to adapt it and what to drop and this and that. Barry followed that pretty closely; he *added*, of course, touches of his own, because he had a very nice story sense. And eventually out of this came something that was really quite an extraordinary story.

LOU: *And what did Stan think of all of this stuff coming out under the Marvel banner?*

ROY: Stan never cared that much for the stuff. He never quite understood what sword and sorcery *was*, or the appeal of CONAN. When the fourth issue came in as a printed copy, you know, complete except minus the cover, I dropped it in his box to take a look at. I said, "This is a very good sword and sorcery story." But Stan didn't care much for it. He liked the book but there were two things, Barry's Conan was still a little bit thin and the story was a little bit quiet. *(Laughter.)* And the other thing I could have changed but I didn't want to, because "Tower of the Elephant" is one of my favorite stories, and it's that Conan doesn't really *do*

"It's always bothered me that some people have assumed all of

Chaykin & Wrightson teamed for this cover for DC's SWORD OF SORCERY #2.

anything that effects the story in the end. He breaks into the tower and so forth, but in the end he just carries this gem around and it's this elephant-headed god that does all of the real work. And that was certainly so far from the kind of story that Stan could relate to — me too sometimes, I suppose, if I hadn't really liked the story — that he just came back shaking his head, saying, "Well, I guess it's all right." *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *But if they're buying it I'm sure he's not too worried about that kind of thing.*

ROY: No, but of course at that time we didn't really know. The first issue sold very well and then the sales declined for the next half-dozen or so issues, and it was virtually cancelled there once.

LOU: *I imagine you really had to keep pitching for that one.*

ROY: Yeah. It was cancelled one day when I was at home writing, I had to come back the next day and get it back on the schedule.

LOU: *Well, one of the things was that Conan was the first Marvel hero that actually killed in the course of a story, not counting the war heroes of course.*

ROY: Yeah. Actually Sgt. Fury and Conan were pretty close as characters, they were real and unreal at the same time. The difference, of course, was that in SGT. FURY everything was *supposed* to be possible. Conan, while he didn't have any super powers, was quite superior; it was more like Captain America with a sword. We had a lot of trouble, we didn't know how much we'd be able to use the sword, we were afraid we'd run *into* trouble and have to keep hitting people with the flat of the sword and so on.

LOU: *With the Code back then.*

ROY: We *did* have trouble with the Comics Code all through the series.

LOU: *Right, and that eventually led to SAVAGE TALES #1*, which almost *worked out, right?*

ROY: Yeah. Well, I mean, it worked *fine* but there were various problems with the package itself and with distribution. They had trouble getting it into Canada because of the kind of material it was — I think Stan made a mistake by having Conan hold up the severed head on the cover. *(Laughter.)* Right away in that day and age, you know — maybe even today, but *especially* back then — it was like waving a red flag in front of a bull. Stan had also wanted a fair amount of nudity and so forth in the book, and then when the book actually came in . . . he would sort of change his mind back and forth as to how much there would be. I mean there is some sort of weird story about the development of almost *everything* in that book, there are horror stories about all angles of it. It got cancelled after the first issue and it was months and months before we were able to do a second one, and when we did Stan gave it over to me. I didn't pay any attention and turned it almost immediately into an almost all CONAN book.

LOU: *Right, and gave us that great adaptation of "Red Nails."*

ROY: Yeah, Stan didn't like that too much either. *(Laughter.)* He called me in and said, "What is this stuff on pages 2 and 3, nothing really *happens!*" I said, "Well, that's the story." *(Laughter.)* And I said, "But look how beautiful it is and everything, people would be interested in it just to look at that artwork." And they were. Those issues sold quite well.

I have, as you know, a fantastic respect for Stan; he was a guy who knew what he was doing. The problem was that when Stan got into an area which he *thought* might be commercial or whatever but which he didn't personally have any *feel* for, it's the same as with anybody else, sometimes the instincts kind of fail you a little bit. I didn't know, you know, if my instincts were always going to be better, but in this particular case they definitely were.

LOU: *You just have to wing it in order to find out, like everything else.*

ROY: Yeah. We used to have a lot of trouble because Stan and I had such *different* feelings about what sword and sorcery ought to be, what the covers ought to be and things of that sort. He didn't interfere too much with the inside, but then he'd come up with some strange cover thing, like that torture type cover on #2. Of course I like it in retrospect because I own it now. *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *Well, one thing I want to get into, since I'm an ELRIC fan, how did you get to team Elric with Conan in issues #14 and #15?*

ROY: Well, basically, I wanted to have some fun with the character and be able

© 1989 DC Comics, Inc.

the (*Conan*) stories were adapted from R.E. Howard originals."

to do some things that were not *just* monster of the month. I was also very much aware of the fact that I didn't want it to be just another Marvel superhero either — even though I love the Marvel superheroes — and if I can judge by various evaluations made at the time I more or less succeeded. So I was *aware* of other series that were coming out. **Fritz Leiber's** FAFHRD AND THE GREY MOUSER we looked into vaguely at one stage before DC did, and the ELRIC material I was aware of and had read a little of. I didn't know how far off those *covers* were, we all realized a little bit too late that the dunce cap was wrong. *(Laughter.)*

But I wrote a letter to **Moorcock** — I forget how I got his address or whatever, it wasn't that hard I suppose — and he and his friend **Jim Cawthorn,** who worked with him on many projects, sent back a plot which was quite detailed, in fact I had to actually *simplify* a few elements here and there and take stuff *out* in order to turn it into even two comic books. I forget what I took out, I've still got that plot somewhere, I should probably sometime get permission to have it printed as such and you could see what was left out. But of course the stuff that was in there was based on his characters, and then Barry went and did a very nice job with it. Barry did not seem to like working on Elric nearly as much as on Conan, it was just not his kind of character, which is weird because actually Barry physically would be closer to Elric than to Conan — as most of us would I guess. *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *Well, I noticed one thing, which hit me when you talked about Stan not liking Barry's skinny Conan, Frank Brunner once wrote that when he was doing the adaptation of ELRIC the first thing Stan said when he saw the artwork was he looked too skinny.*

ROY: Yeah, and Frank's actually looked much more powerful than some of the others. *(Laughter.)* I do think that **Brunner's** ELRIC is one of the very best, and his CONAN too, when he finally did one or two.

LOU: *Well, I'm a dyed in the wool ELRIC fan so I had to ask about that.*

ROY: I enjoy working on ELRIC. We seem to have a different artist at first, every series on it, but it's very nice.

LOU: *Well, what can you tell me about the other Howard heroes you did at Marvel, Red Sonja, King Kull, and Soloman Kane.*

ROY: Well, I don't know what exactly to say *about* them, so much has been said. The most interesting of the group, from the point of view of the origin, was Red Sonja. Once every few months someone will ask me, "I don't understand, in what CONAN book does Red Sonja appear?" And of course she doesn't appear in *any* of them. I had to explain this to some people for the movies even, a few years ago. She appeared in the story that was set in

Frank Brunner's ELRIC.

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"Stan (Lee) never cared that much for the (Conan) stuff."

the 16th century that I *changed* into a CONAN story, and I used a lot of it; so in that sense **Robert E. Howard** definitely *created* Red Sonja. I changed the spelling from Sonya to Sonja just to make it a little more different character, and it looked a little bit more exotic to me, and in *some* ways made it a different character, one I virtually cocreated in "Shadow of the Vulture."

And of course after that one story, which didn't tell a lot *about* her except certain character traits of being a fierce swordswoman — kind of a standard character, there wasn't that much else there — I had to later create an origin and various other things for her in "The Song of Red Sonja." One thing that I was *especially* happy with, although some people disagree, was I was quite pleased with the origin of the character, and I was pleased with was this motif, this phrase — that I took possibly indirectly from Irish legend, particularly from **William Butler Yeates,** the play that details it is called ON BAILEY'S STRAND — about never loving a man who hadn't defeated her in

THE CURSE OF THE GOLDEN SKULL!
I TELL YOU, CAPTAIN, I JUST DON'T LIKE IT!
I KNOW THESE HILL-DOGS! I FOUGHT THEM MONTHS AGO, AND BARELY ESCAPED WITH MY HIDE.
IT'S NOT THEIR WAY TO LEAVE A PASS LIKE THIS UNGUARDED.
I STILL SAY WE SHOULD HAVE SENT SCOUTS UP AHEAD--!
NONSENSE! YOU'RE A GOOD SOLDIER, CIMMERIAN-- BUT, LIKE ALL BARBARIANS, TOO SUPERSTITIOUS.
NO HILLMAN IN HIS RIGHT MIND WOULD DARE MOLEST A HAND-PICKED TROOP OF TURANIAN CAVALRY!

From "The Curse of the Golden Skull!" (CONAN #37) by Thomas & Adams.

"We used to have trouble because Stan and I had different

Conan by Frank Brunner.

battle. And so with a little bit of **Yeates** and a little bit of **Howard** and a few other things here and there I had what I thought was a *great* character, whom **Dino De Laurentiis** then proceeded to ruin in a movie. *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *He's good at that.*

ROY: Yeah, yeah. *(Laughter.)* You know **Gerry Conway** and I were offered the chance to *write* that movie. Of course several people did, **Doug Moench** wrote a draft of it also, he didn't get any credit, and so did **Rosco Polanberg** who had been the original writer of the EXCALBUR movie. They ended up with a kind of a mishmash so they tried to throw **Schwartzenegger** into it pretty much simply in order to capitalize on that, which took the focus away from Sonja and made it an even worse movie than it otherwise would have been. It will probably become a camp favorite now because **Brigitte Nielson** became more famous after marrying and divorcing **Stallone.** And the movie *did* have some nice visual effects, it's just that the story was so awful.

LOU: *Well, that's not the first time they've adapted something awfully from comics, Roy.*

ROY: It sure isn't. I missed my share of the 75 grand was all. *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *Have you been talking about doing the CONAN book again?*

ROY: No. You know, it's one of those things that's been off and on ever since I was first talking to them, from time to time the CONAN thing will come up, like over lunch with **Tom DeFalco** and **Michael Higgins,** because he was the editor of the book. But I don't have a lot of interest in being a CONAN writer. I did enjoy being *the* CONAN writer, doing all of it and sort of playing around with that universe. Even though sword and sorcery is not a favorite type of literature of mine at all, CONAN and **Robert E. Howard's** writing became really a great interest of mine, I've found that I miss them *greatly* in the eight years or so since I left the series I needed a break after the *thousands* of pages I had done, but still I miss it.

But now they've got it really kind of strung out — and I understand now that the three CONAN books are under three different editors. My own feelings are that things are best served when one person handles the character, basically. I remember the *disastrous* results DC had

feelings about what S&S ought to be — he didn't interfere."

© 1969 Richard Corben

when they split up the SUPERMAN books after **Mort Weisinger** left, they were terrible and it never really recovered from that. CONAN may very well not suffer that, after all there is the hard core of **Robert E. Howard** and the life of the character there and so forth, but there is always that danger of dissipating the character and suddenly having him not seem like the same character in the separate books.

LOU: *Right.*

ROY: But, you know, it's up to them, it may be that the core of the character is strong enough to hold it together anyway and maybe they'll be three wonderful books.

LOU: *Well, speaking personally, most of the scripts have been boring since you left, because of the inconsistency in them.*

ROY: I prefer not to comment on that. I've read an awful lot of them and my stomach is too weak to say out loud — *(Laughter.)* But I don't want to anger anybody, I'm not talking about any writer because it's not the writing or anything like that; I just feel that there is a tendency to forget the fact that it was kind of like somebody's *life* mapped out, and therefore whether it's good art or good writing or whatever it just isn't anything that I can relate to. I feel I probably shouldn't say any more.

LOU: *Okay — but if you ever decide to go back to CONAN be sure and tell me.*

ROY: Well, it would be difficult because . . . it wouldn't be hard to start writing CONAN, it would be a lot of fun, but the real problem would be the fact that he's now either three minutes or eight years older than he was when I left. You know, if I could start with what amounted to #116, which is the issue after I left, it would be a lot of fun. But if it means counting a lot of stuff that came in between that doesn't to me have — and I'm sure there are some very good stories in there, and good art and all that — but it now no longer has the feeling of following this guy around, keeping to this person's life. He's had a lot of different episodes that he should have done in this time if they were following anything even remotely *resembling* the passage of time of about one year per year, which I did during the ten years that I wrote the book. It's probably a little easier with SAVAGE SWORD, but CONAN THE BARBARIAN needed a different approach. The book still does okay, you know, but it's not one of Marvel's biggies either. It was a little *bigger*, you know, before.

LOU: *Talking about Howard characters, is there any chance of anybody doing a Breckinridge Elkins adaptation?*

Conan by Richard Corben.

ROY: I haven't heard any talk about that. That's humor in a L'IL ABNER kind of vein and I could see where somebody could have a lot of fun with it.

LOU: *That could be a fun backup.*

ROY: They're nice stories, they're fun to read, but I guess it's just something that never interested me as much, in terms of adapting.

LOU: *And what about KING KULL? In the early days it seemed to get cancelled every six months and then would start up again. I was wondering if the reason for that wouldn't be that basically the concept of Kull being the king and having to sit there on the throne was not as interesting as the wandering reaver that was Conan?*

ROY: Well, **Howard** learned *that* very quickly. The first two CONAN stories published were with Conan as the king — although stories like "Frost Giant's Daughter" with him in an earlier stage were, I understand, submitted at almost the same time but turned down by WEIRD TALES. But still he was a king in the first two stories and then only one other novel, which was not even being done for WEIRD TALES but for publication in England, and that never came off and the book eventually became CONAN THE CONQUEROR. Except for those stories he immediately went back to Conan

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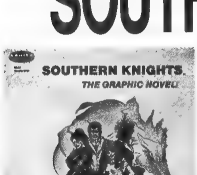

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"Brunner's *Elric* is one of the very best, and his *Conan* too."

From the sketch book of William Stout.

wandering around

That's an approach I discussed with Marvel for the last year off and on, with **Michael Higgins** when he was editor, and with **Tom DeFalco** and so forth. I have a proposal in there now for a graphic novel, because that seemed to be the route to go rather than the idea of a series, which would start out with Kull's young life and try to follow that through the same way we did for Conan. Of course we don't have the **Robert E. Howard** stories to go by — there's very little, only a few pages and a few clues and a couple of paragraphs, about his life — but I still think that the world of Kull could be very interesting if it were done that way. I would still love to do this, I want to keep looking after this proposal, but as a matter of fact I should probably *thank* Marvel for not *jumping* at it when I first asked them about it.

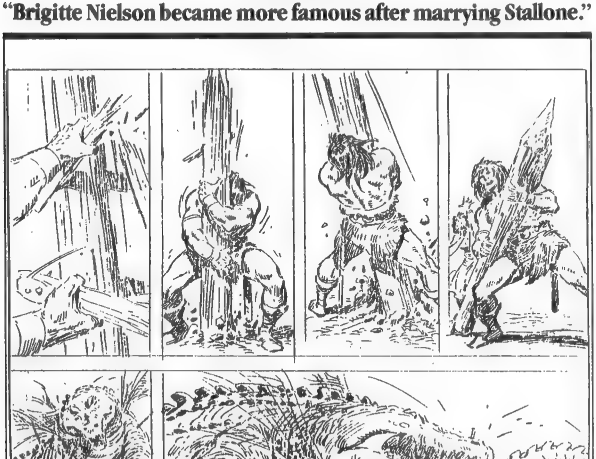
They didn't seem to be interested in doing KULL, and I think understandably because it *has* failed so many times, even with that beautiful **Bolton** art, and with different people they've had *nice* art. I presume they've had nice writing, I don't usually read the material of this type. I tried reading some of the early post **Thomas** CONANs and they were so painful I quit; I mean not that I thought what I did was always so great, but I didn't think the other people *caught* it, and I haven't read it in some time now and I prefer *not* to. But that doesn't mean I'm saying it's bad, it just means I prefer not to be involved to look at it and have any opinion one way or the other It's not a book I ever look at.

But anyway, the thing is I really really wanted to do, and still want to do, KULL, and I felt like after my trip back it the spring of 1987 that I just wasn't getting anywhere with that idea. Quite frankly I was *astonished* because I felt if the person who had made CONAN a hit comic — and I don't take all of the credit for that, certainly **Barry Smith** and later **John Buscema** did excellent work, and **Gil Kane** and a lot of other people, and the time was right and so on, and there is a lot of luck involved — but as the only common factor beside **Robert E. Howard,** in the material, and having done it so successfully for a *decade,* it seemed as if it might have made a little sense to take a chance with me doing the series. It was kind of frustrating not to have them jump at the chance, but they have their reasons, and they were very nervous about KULL because it had been a failure before, and I understand that.

So, having this frustration I was thinking in some other terms, and then a little before Christmas my wife and I decided to drive cross country to my mother's house in Missouri, and we drove through Texas. I discovered suddenly — I had certainly not planned this in advance — that Cross Plains was only about 30 or 40 miles off the main road we were taking, **Robert E. Howard**'s birth and death place, so I decided that we just *had* to go see it. I spent about 45 minutes traipsing around in a cemetery — my wife Dann wouldn't leave the car, she's not sentimental about graves — *(Laughter.)* This was during the day, I don't know if I would have done it at night, and there was a funeral going on and I didn't want to bother people so I was sort of — I don't know what they *thought* I was doing — I sort of lurked around trying to look at all of the gravestones as close as I could get without disturbing their funeral. *(Laughter.)* I felt a little uneasy about it, and eventually they began to go away, but I still couldn't *find* it. Then I began to realize that there was a good chance he was buried in Brownwood, 30 or 40 *more* miles away, and that turned out, when I checked, to be the case. I saw some names of people who must have been relatives and friends

Cover illustration for a fanzine (by Barry Smith, the art — only).

"Brigitte Nielson became more famous after marrying Stallone."



Conan pencils by John Buscema.

of his, and some names I recognized from his letters and so on.

But anyway, in doing this I realized the extent to which I had missed working on CONAN and with **Robert E. Howard** material and so forth, and I'd always had such good terms with **Glenn Lord** because I think he sensed that, in addition to anything else, that I really did like the material, that I wasn't just on some ego trip to do something with it for just myself. So I contacted him and we very quickly, with my agent **Mike Friedrich,** worked out a deal to handle so many of these other characters who have a *lot* of potential. Cormac Mac Art, for example, has been the subject of no less than a half-dozen novels by **Andy Offut** — which we may also adapt, we're talking to Andy about that. But there's an awful *lot* of untapped possibility that **Howard** would have probably have gotten around to if he hadn't got onto the CONAN thing; there are so many other characters there.

I mean one of the *big* companies that turned down the idea of doing the **Robert E. Howard** material said that, you know, these were minor characters; but this is the point because, as Mike said, there was no character more minor than Red Sonja. I mean she never became a big character for Marvel, but I notice that they hang onto her. It was not Marvel, by the way, that turned them down — I don't want any misunderstanding there. I'm just saying that a minor character can develop into something big later on. *All* characters start off as minor characters, with very rare exceptions.

LOU: *Yeah, you just need a sympathetic person to work with them, as Neal Adams said once.*

"Sword and sorcery is not a favorite type of literature of mine."

ROY: Someone asked me if I really thought the **Robert E. Howard** material was necessarily a gold mine, and I said, "You know, there's a lot of mines besides gold." You can make a lot of money out of zinc mining and copper mining, gold's not the only thing.

LOU: *Right, even coal.*

ROY: It's a matter of what you *do* with it. **Besides,** it's not *just* business. Even though it's partly done to give myself some work that I can really enjoy and have a certain amount of control over and enthusiasm for, it's mostly because I genuinely like working with the material.

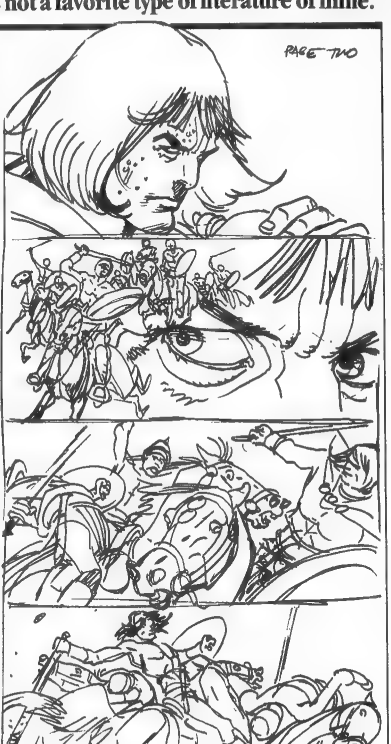
LOU: *Now, Roy, why don't we get into your new Robert E. Howard books coming out from Hero Comics. What can you tell me about that?*

ROY: Well, it's not that we have a lot of books coming out from Hero Comics as such, maybe I gave you the wrong idea. **Dennis Mallonee,** the publisher of Hero Comics, was the first person to make a deal with us for *some* of the **Robert E. Howard** material that we had licensed from **Glenn Lord** on behalf of the **Robert E. Howard** estate, but exactly how much material is going to be coming out from anyone and so forth, there's only a little bit of information that can be revealed at this particular point because everything is still in negotiation. I can talk about the kind of things that we've leased and what we might want to do with it, but if you're looking for information on particular books *that's* still some months away.

LOU: *So... you haven't even licensed anything in particular?*

ROY: Oh, the deal was only formally signed in the last few weeks. It was petty well understood before that but we couldn't proceed until we had everything down pat; we were waiting for a couple of things, for example, that were covered but depended upon whether or not Marvel would release them, because they were things Marvel *used* to have. It's only been in the last few weeks that Marvel has admitted that they're not going to do anything with that and therefore, since they don't pay anything for it, the material was free to be included under the license as Glenn and I had agreed.

Now, what we're going to be doing for Dennis is — there are a couple of things in the works that I can't go into, unfortunately, because if something goes wrong it wouldn't come out there or so forth — the main thing we're doing right now is a very nice series of the nonseries stories. Not that some of those characters wouldn't be worthy of a series, and there *are* potential series that might come out of them,



Kane's original breakdowns for page two of CONAN ANNUAL#6 (1981).

"Dennis Mallonee, the publisher of Hero Comics, was the first

COME, YOU FLAME-EYED DEVILS!
BE YOU NATURAL WOLVES, OR CREATURES SPAWNED IN HELL!"
...YOU'LL NOT FIND SOLOMON KANE A CRINGING VICTIM!
IF THE WOLVES HEAR AND COMPREHEND, THEY GIVE NO VISIBLE SIGN...
...BUT CIRCLE EVER CLOSER TO THEIR CHOSEN QUARRY...
...ONLY TO FIND THAT HE STRIKES BACK, LIKE A BEAST AT BAY!
BUT, SHEER COURAGE WILL NOT CARRY HIM SAFELY THROUGH THIS TRIPLE RING OF TERROR...

Roy teamed with artist Alan Weiss (and the Crusty Bunkers) for this SOLOMON KANE story.

but these basically are the one-shot stories **Howard** did. They're not all sword and sorcery, many are but **Howard** wrote a wide variety of pulp material in the fantasy vein. Without even going too far afield for simply things that were even Lovecraftian fantasy — which we may do some of — or humorous fantasy like his Westerns and so forth, or some of his boxing stories and things which *sometimes* had elements of fantasy in them, we were going for things that were more heroic fantasy, whether sword and sorcery or a little more broad in a pulp magazine sense.

So Dennis has a new book coming out, a continuation of his FANTASY BOOK — I presume that will still be the title — which is going to be a fairly large book with about half prose and half comics, or graphic story material. Not *all* of the comics material will be **Robert E. Howard,** but in each issue there will be an average of 20 pages or so of the **Robert E. Howard** stories. The first thing we're doing is actually a two-parter, because many of the stories *can't* be adapted that well into 20 pages and really get their flavor. I could do that when I was adapting *into* the CONAN canon because then I was dropping a lot of nonessential details and changing others things, would just take whatever would fit into the story. But I didn't want to do that this time, so sometimes they may take 40 pages or so spread over two issues. There are a couple of stories that have never been printed except in fan magazines and so forth, by the way, that we'll be adapted as well. And later on we'd like to take some of these stories, maybe *several* of them, and combine them and reprint them in perhaps a graphic story anthology.

The very first one we have planned is a story called "Marchers of Valhalla," which is more or less a sword and sorcery story in the mode of stories like "Valley of the Worm" and "The Garden of Fear," one of these stories that takes place in the forgotten dim primordial mists of time thousands and thousands of years ago when these nomadic peoples — which **Howard** had a tendency to use under the name the Aesir — were wandering the world and, of course, they would encounter these strange cities, basalt towers to the skies and that kind of thing. That's what the first story is; I think it's actually being told in two 25-page chapters, so it's actually a 50-page story. It's quite an interesting story because, like *many* of **Howard's** stories in this vein, it was treated as if it was like a racial memory within the brain of a modern day man, so you saw it partly through the eyes of people thousands and thousands of years ago, partly through the eyes of a modern per-

to make a deal with us for the R.E.H. material from Glenn Lord."

son. He had a hero he used in a lot of those stories, sometimes not named, sometimes with the name James O'Brien.

LOU: *I believe you did a CONAN story with Alex Nino which touched on that.*

ROY: Right, that was one of them, there were several of those. "Marchers of Valhalla" is a story that . . . we made one change in it. I wanted to be able to stick very close to **Howard** this time, because before when I was doing the CONAN adaptations in some cases, you know, we would naturally have to change them more, drop out some things and sometimes alter the sense of the story somewhat. But I always thought what fun and how nice it would be to do these stories *straight*, using **Howard's** prose and his images and his storytelling talents and so forth, and combine that with excellent art. In this particular case we *do* have an excellent artist, **Nester Redondo,** whose work is quite well known to American comics fans, he's done lovely paintings and art for the various CONAN books at Marvel, and he's doing a wonderful job.

So the thing that's interesting about the first story is that . . . we decided to introduce the series — which we call THE WORLD OF ROBERT E. HOWARD as a tentative and probably final title — so I changed James O'Brien in this *particular* story to **Robert E. Howard** himself, so **Howard** appears in the beginning and end. That really did not entail much in the way of changing the story because the story is set *in* Texas, in the central Texas area where Cross Plains is, so therefore there was very little that we had to do in order

Conan by Tanino Liberatore (THE SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN #97).

to turn that into **Robert E. Howard** in the beginning and end. I thought it would be nice if **Howard** were there in the very first story, so to speak, to be a visible presence as well as his name always being used.

After that we have other stories in the works. One of them is being done by **Mark Beachum,** who of course is one of the people who came out of **Neal Adams'** studio; he does *excellent* work, has a *wonderful* style! We were supposed to work together on a series at Marvel but somehow or another it never quite worked out. So that story that Mark is working

NO, LORD CONAN... FOR, THE PRECISE LOCATIONS OF THE TROVE IS NOT KNOWN... SAVE TO ONE MAN.
TO WHOM?
TO MY UNWORTHY SELF, OF COURSE.
CROM AND ERLIK!
IF YOU'VE KNOWN WHERE THIS LOOT WAS HIDDEN WHY HAVEN'T YOU DUG IT UP ERE NOW?
MY PEOPLE ARE HAUNTED BY SUPERSTITIOUS FEARS, GALLANT SIR...

Gene Colan's only Conan work, from SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN #33 (inks by Pablo Marcos).

"Mark (Beachum) is working on 'The Gods of the North', a

on is called "The Gods of the North, "and that's a very *strange* story because it was originally written as a CONAN story but it was never sold as part of the CONAN series. **Howard** changed the name from Conan to Amra and it was printed in a friend's fan magazine in the 1930s while he was still alive, and that was actually its only publication until the 1960s. Strangely enough it was adapted once before in comics, in STAR-STUDDED which was one of the early comics oriented fanzines.

LOU: *Yeah, I've got a copy of it.*

ROY: It's very weird because — the CONAN version which **Barry Smith** and I did is called "The Frost Giant's Daughter "— it's a very minor little effort as far as the story, but it has *wonderful* opportunities for art as Barry proved the first time around, and Mark I think will do this time. It'll be interesting to compare the three stories. There are certain changes being made because we might decide we want to continue Amra as a character some way or other, but not in the sense of imitating other CONAN stories because there's really not that much of Conan in the story; it's really just a guy with a sword, and if you didn't *know* it you would never think it a CONAN story in the first place.

LOU: *Well, while we're still on the subject of Robert E. Howard why don't we get into your movie work, the first two CONANs and FIRE AND ICE, which you worked on with Frazetta. How was it working with Frazetta, by the way?*

ROY: Well, it was just very strange. I had been contacted because **Mike Ploog** was working with **Ralph Bakshi** about the time that I decided to move to California, in '76, so **Mike Ploog** had me come out and meet **Ralph Bakshi** to talk about doing something, but that didn't quite work out because I was also involved in the early stages with the first CONAN movie and that sort of became a conflict. Later on Ralph called up, on January 2nd, the first workday of 1981, and suddenly offered me — this is like several years later now — offered me a chance to work on another movie. He'd had some other people working on it and it hadn't worked out and he was getting desperate to get something going. I called **Gerry Conway,** who had had a relative by marriage die back East, and got him to come back early so I could bring him in on it — we had previously written some filmscripts that hadn't been made, but that sort of gave us something people could read and know what we were doing and so on — and so we bashed that out in short order.

Conan by Mike Ploog.

Frazetta was involved in the early stages in terms of the story, but it was a little bit too much to have the four of us in there hashing things out. **Frazetta** would think in terms of a few visuals, and so would Ralph, and Gerry and I were constantly trying to get the *story,* and somehow I don't think we ever really got on a real solid track with it. I think it is certainly as nice looking as many of Ralph's movies, *most* of them, but... The strange thing was Ralph had us write a script that was a two-hour script. He said, "Write it, this has all got to be in there." I said, "But it'll be a two-hour script." He said, "That's fine, just put it in there." And then he took it and cut it into about 78 minutes. *(Laughter.)* I mean the lines that are in there are mostly ours, but it's like the READER'S DIGEST version. And when you take out the things that *explain* things — we had relationships and reasons why *this* character or *that* character did something, a *past* for the characters, and all of that went in favor of just sheer action — I think that is a mistake. It ended up then looking too much like a cartoon, without the depth that Ralph originally wanted — he cut out the very things that he wanted to give it depth. **Frazetta,** of course, only cared about **Frazetta's** drawings and trying to get the feeling of his artwork in there. So we were all sort of on different wavelengths, just four talented people who couldn't make the greatest team in the world. *(Laughter.)* But of course it did make the CONAN thing possible; because the fact that we had done a movie that had actually come out, had been released by 20th Century-Fox, on top of a few other things here and there in between, made Gerry and me what they

strange story because it was originally written as a *Conan* story."

Conan by Jeff Jones.

call . . .

LOU: *Bankable?*

ROY: No, no, not *bankable*, not *that* one! *(Laughter.)* Feasible or whatever phrase they use.

LOU: *Viable.*

ROY: Whatever, we were *acceptable* writers because we had a credit, plus the fact that **Ed Pressman** *wanted* us. I had been involved as a sort of uncredited consultant — for which I was nicely paid for very little work — on the first movie; so we had this weird thing where **Pressman** called me because he needed to get some money out of me.

LOU: *Oh?*

ROY: I had been paid ten grand for writing what ended up being 30 or 40 pages of notes, and going to a couple of meetings. That was it. **Dino De Laurentiis** had taken over, had bought out some of the interest in the CONAN property even on the first movie, was supposed to reimburse him, but he had written the $10,000 check to *me*. So Ed had to call up and we were talking, and by the time he got around to telling me the *real* reason why he had called, which was to get me to hand over the $10,000 check without any static or whatever — *(Laughter.)* But, you know, we had already talked, he knew about FIRE AND ICE and some other things — we had had two or three other script assignments by then, we had actually written three or four movies and been paid for them all even though only one was made — and so he said they were starting another CONAN and we ought to come in and talk. So Gerry and I did and the next thing you know we were writing the second movie. I'm convinced that that never would have happened if I hadn't had to endorse that check. *(Laughter.)* Of course I did, it was not *my* money and while I would have loved to have kept it — it was his.

LOU: *Have you met any of the people in the movies, such as Schwarzenegger?*

ROY: I've met **Schwarzenegger** a number of times, but not too many of the others. I met **Gerry Lopez**, who was the sidekick in the first movie, because he was there at the test that I went to. I went up to this place where **Schwarzenegger** was

"I realized the extent to which I missed working on *Conan*."

making this test, it was the scene from the movie where he was sitting around talking about the gods and Crom and everything; it was a nice little scene set up there in this little production facility, you know, but it was not the version used in the movie. It's kind of funny because they were all sitting there eating this chicken, and right outside of camera range, of course, is this Colonel Sander's box. *(Laughter.)* And once when I went up to Western Costume here — which a lot of studios use and get things from — to get costumes for Dann and me to go as Conan and Red Sonja to a party, they were also shopping for things for that screen test with **Schwarzenegger.** So Conan and I shop at the same place. *(Laughter.)*

(Oops — did we promise last issue that this issue would have the conclusion of the definitive comics history of Roy Thomas. Boy, talk about counting your chickens... you see, something happened to the tape containing the conclusion of Roy and Lou's little talk, we can't find it. We're searching high, we're searching low, we've got some of Uncle Sam's employees on the case even; we have every intention of seeing this through no matter what, so keep an eye out for the next COMICS INTERVIEW, or maybe the one after, or the one after that. And until then just remember to keep buying them bonds!!) pst, dak, why don't we cop a plea and say this is the definitive RT — none of the rest of that stuff happened anyway, post crisis continuity wise you see, so...

© 1989 Frank Frazetta & Ralph Bakshi

Pencil designs by Frank Frazetta (from FIRE & ICE).

"As far as coming up w/TREKKER . . . it just kind of came to me."

I initially met Ron Randall at his first convention here in Portland. He struck me as very quiet and thoughtful. Before speaking, he seemed to measure what he was going to say, something most people would do well to learn.

Ron seems extremely shy and self-effacing; at first he didn't especially want to do the interview, as he felt he had nothing very profound to say. Keep an eye on this boy, though, because despite his quiet demeanor, he's a major artistic talent to be reckoned with. It's always the quiet ones you have to watch.

ANDY MANGELS: *Ron, we'll start off with a really vague question right off the bat — how and why TREKKER?* (Laughter.) *How did you come up with the concept, and why did you do a concept that was fairly new to comics?*

RON RANDALL: How did I? *(Laughter.)* This is a good question — I was just recently asked that by somebody else. This is one of those questions that writers get asked — where do you come up with your ideas — and from your subconscious I suppose is the ultimate answer. As far as coming up with TREKKER . . it just kind of came to me.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Ron Randall
Born: A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away (but I'm 31 in Earth years)
Residence: Portland, Oregon
Favorite Wife: Linda Randall
Favorite Daughter: Lisa Anne [illegible]
Blood Type: Higgins
Education: 1979 Graduate Joe Kubert School
Credits: Misc. SGT. ROCK back-ups, Misc. DC horror books, BARREN EARTH, ARAK, ME & JOE PRIEST Graphic Novel, WARLORD, AIRBOY, HAWKMAN SPECIAL, SWAMP THING and TREKKER
Favorite Comics: LOVE & ROCKETS, NEXUS, CONCRETE, Williamson's FLASH GORDON, and Foster's PRINCE VALIANT
Pet Peeve: People who have Pet Peeves
Favorite Thing To Draw: WOMEN!
Comic Artist Influences: Hal Foster, Al Williamson, Wally Wood, and all the other EC "fiteagles"
Favorite Films: CASABLANCA, LAWRENCE OF ARABIA, THIEF OF BAGHDAD (with Douglas Fairbanks)
Most Bizarre Accomplishment: Putting a relatively clean story into PARADE OF GORE (a Kubert fanzine of strange stories)

RON RANDALL

Trekker TM & © 1988 Ron Randall

"I have a long-term view of how I see the character going."

Ron Randall's DRAGONLANCE series for DC Comics.

That's kind of a lame answer but that's the way it was. It started off with just the setting and the premise — you know, futuristic — and for some reason I thought the idea of a female bounty hunter seemed to gel. And as I thought about it a little bit more, more things about her personality started to come to me, and I convinced myself that it was something I would like to do and started out working on it. It could develop into something, I hoped. That's about as specific as I can be about *where* it all came from. It wasn't like, "Oh, I knew somebody like that once." *(Laughter.)*

ANDY: *Did you have a background in reading science fiction, is the bounty hunter motif a favorite of yours, or was it just something you wanted to experiment with?*

RON: Well, I have a fondness for science fiction but I wouldn't call myself *particularly* well read in it. I've read some. In fact I even hesitate to call TREKKER science fiction because, I forget which author it was, maybe it was **Asimov**, who said to him science fiction meant that you had a whole lot of science and then you sort of do logical extrapolation *from* that. What I do with TREKKER is more what I'd call science fantasy, you know, because that gives me the out of not having to have all of my scientific facts down quite as carefully or as thoroughly as a *real* scientist would do. But anyway, I started from liking science fiction, science fantasy, or adventure stuff, you know, in books and comics and movies, of course. So that did have an influence, I suppose. And I'd already done THE BARREN EARTH for DC, with **Gary Coen,** and that was I would say pretty much in the same vein, science fiction or science fantasy depending on what terms you like to use.

ANDY: *It was also with another tough female character.*

RON: It was too, yeah — by happy coincidence I guess I'd say. *(Laughter.)* Yeah, that was a real good experience and I felt comfortable with the genre.

ANDY: *How did you get involved with Dark Horse and TREKKER?*

RON: Well, that's a pretty good one too. I had just moved back here to Oregon from the east coast where I'd been working for DC, and I came to a convention shortly after I'd moved back and **Randy Stradley** came up and introduced himself. This was when they were just getting started, Dark Horse hadn't put anything out, and he said that they'd be happy to have me do something for them, just expressed a lot of interest and left me with that. At the time I thought that was a nice offer but nothing was right off the top of my head that I was ready to work on.

But that sort of stayed with me, that there was a good possibility for me to start doing some writing and explore some ideas. Soon after that the TREKKER thing just sort of started — I guess my subconscious was working on it — and it just kind of suggested itself to me. So I wrote up a pretty short series overview and sent it to Randy, and he and Mike were interested so they got the ball rolling. Then I just did it initially as a two-part — how do you say this, a two-part eight-page — *(Laughter.)* I did it as a short series in DARK HORSE PRESENTS, let's put it that way, and they were pretty enthusiastic about it and decided to go with some full-length stories. So that's how it got started.

ANDY: *And then the run ended after the sixth issue, was that because of other commitments or what?*

RON: A lot of factors were involved in that, yeah; time juggling and scheduling and all sorts of things.

ANDY: *But you intend to continue doing TREKKER?*

RON: Yeah, in the future. I have a long-term view of how I see the character going, I have a whole sort of personal story of hers that I want to tell. TREKKER has by *no* means ended, in fact I feel I'm really just at the beginning. You'd think after having done six full issues I should be far along with it, but I really feel that I'm just beginning to start to put together the story that I really want to ultimately tell. So yes, I do expect to do more with TREKKER.

ANDY: *Possibly at short intervals, one or two stories a year or something?*

RON: Something like that or a mini-series a year, we'll just see how it goes; we'll see how my schedule goes and how the interest is out there and how it is maintained over the long haul and all that

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"She looks real soft sometimes but has a real hard edge."

stuff. Scheduling is one of the big considerations. I find there to be a lot of pressure involved in trying to write, pencil and ink the whole book ongoing on a regular continued basis. It was one of those things where I couldn't hardly get *away* from it, when I wasn't at the drawing board there was plotting out the next issue going on in the back of my head.

ANDY: *How was the response to it, with the fact that most female characters cannot carry a whole series unto themselves?*

RON: Well, I would say it was pretty enthusiastic. On the basis of the letters and when I would go to conventions, I would get some pretty nice comments from people. It seemed to be accomplishing what I was setting out to do with it, to hopefully present a female protagonist with a strong personality of her own and who could be seen as real believable and convincing and strong enough to interest readers.

ANDY: *Do you think because she was a tough, sometimes violent character that that lent anything to her popularity?*

RON: It certainly was an appealing aspect to me. It was that same sort of dichotomy that I was going for in giving her a name like Mercy, you know, sort of like having jarring contradictions. As far as her being young and attractive, of course we have so many, you really don't want to stereotype people and fit them into niches, so making her at the same time sort of hard — she looks real soft sometimes but has a real hard edge to her, you know. So it was the combination of those different elements that made the character sort of

Panels from TREKKER (above), and one of Ron's SWAMP THING issues (below).

Swamp Thing TM & © 1988 DC Comics, Inc.

"DRAGONLANCE, I'm pencilling and inking with a lot of

charismatic to me, and hopefully to the readers. It *seemed* to be that way from some of the response that we got, the readers found her an *interesting* combination of different elements.

And, as I was saying earlier, I feel like I have a long way to go with what I want to do with the character, in exploring her contradictions and getting deeper into her personality and into a lot of other aspects that *she* isn't even aware of yet. That's something I'm really eager to do with it as the stories go on.

ANDY: *Some people viewed her and her friend as having possibly a Lesbian relationship, would you want to comment on that?*

RON: That's not it, no. I'll just leave it at that. I have some ideas there and there's a definite purpose to that relationship that has a lot to do with the way the future storyline will be evolving, but it isn't a homosexual relationship at all and I don't want to comment any more on it until I develop it more

ANDY: *Did you get a lot of comparisons with EVANGELINE, another tough female bounty hunter type of book?*

RON: Actually no, nobody brought it up. *(Laughter.)* At least not to my ears. It wasn't on my mind doing it and nobody ever brought it to mind for me.

ANDY: *Although you did get one comparison to pork chops.* (Laughter.)

RON: Yeah. I remember that one. *(Laughter.)*

ANDY: *We won't comment on what reviewer it was that said that, some Andy or something somewhere.* (Laughter.) *Well, let's go back to the very beginning of your career. You're what's known as an XQB, what is that and how did you start?*

RON: Well, I prefer to think of it as a Kubist myself, but yes, I am one of *those*. I went to the Kubert School in the *second* year that it was around, so I was in the second graduating class. The first class had people like **Steve Bissette** and **Rick Veitch** and **Tom Yeates** in it, and then my class had people like **Tom Mandrake** and **Jan Duursema** and **Kim Demolder** and myself. Let's see, what are you asking? *(Laughter.)* How did I get there?

ANDY: *Well, yeah. How many years did you go to the school and how did you start your career from there?*

RON: Okay. Well, I went to the school, it was a two-year program when I went there — it's now a three-year program as I understand it. So I went there for the two years, graduated, and then spent another year in a tremendously fruitful relationship with **Joe Kubert** himself. Me and a few others in the class worked with him on some short stories that were eventually used in the back of the SGT. ROCK books, and it was a very intense sort of one-on-one relationship. He went over what we were doing like every step of the way, sort of picking our brains and pointing out weaknesses, so it was a really good learning experience. Then with *that* experience under my belt I just began putting together portfolio pieces and trotting them up to DC and to Marvel, and *gradually* I started getting work on the basis of that.

ANDY: *What did you do up at DC?*

RON: Well, the first stuff that I did for DC outside of what I'd done through Joe for SGT. ROCK were a few stories for their mystery books, HOUSE OF MYSTERY and HOUSE OF SECRETS — I don't know that I did anything for HOUSE OF SECRETS — and WEIRD WAR. Then those magazines folded, and then through a nicety of circumstances and with the help of **Jan Duursema** I got hooked up with **Lorrie Sutton,** who was looking for a new backup feature to use in WARLORD. Lorrie put me together

Projectiles speak louder than words (Ron's TREKKER).

TM & © 1988 Ron Randall

good background help on that by Randy Elliot in N.Y."

with **Gary Coen** and that's how we came up with THE BARREN EARTH. It was at that point where I really started working sort of steadily and regularly up there, because that was a steady assignment, a monthly assignment.

From there what happened next was . . . **Roy Thomas** was looking for an artist on ARAK at one point, apparently he noticed my stuff in THE BARREN EARTH and asked me if I wanted to take on ARAK, so I did that and worked on that for awhile. Then we did a mini-series of THE BARREN EARTH so I had to leave ARAK. And then after that I did a few one-shot jobs for DC; an issue of TEEN TITANS, a SUPERMAN story, the HAWKMAN SPECIAL that I inked, and some fill-in work on SWAMP THING. Then I did the JOE PRIEST graphic novel also. And that led to getting the regular WARLORD lead feature, and that's the job that I had when I moved back here to Oregon. I kept working on that and TREKKER started to sort of get generated at the same time, and then I also worked on AIRBOY for I guess about half a year. That pretty much brings us up to date I think.

ANDY: *How do you feel you worked with scripting your own stories as opposed to adapting somebody else's scripts? Is it easier for you to adapt scripts in some ways? Is it easier to completely do it yourself? What are the advantages of each?*

RON: That varies a lot, really, with who you're working with and how you're working with them. For instance right now I'm working on a thing called DRAGONLANCE for DC and the writer of this is **Dan Mischkin.** He lives in Michigan so I get the plot from him and do the pencilling from that, then he gets it back and does the dialoguing, so we're working in that style, and this has worked out tremendously comfortable. I'm *really* happy with the plots he gives me, they're real clear and make good sense and are very strong stories to work from. It's very comfortable working that way.

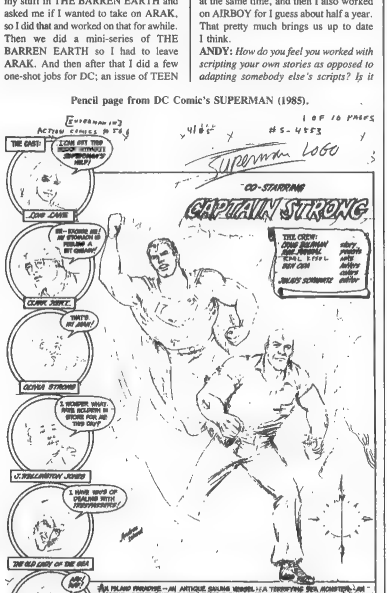
When I . . . Usually I don't have too much trouble I guess, when I'm working with another writer. I'll occasionally come up against a scene or a sequence where I'm having trouble visualizing what they have in mind, and of course that doesn't happen very often when I'm drawing my own stories because when I'm writing it the pictures tend to suggest themselves right into my head. So sometimes it's a little easier on that score, of it's a little easier to picture exactly what the writer had in mind. But, as I maybe hinted at a little earlier, the writing for me is a fairly painful process sometimes, so there are certain advantages to letting somebody else do that share of the work. *(Laughter.)*

ANDY: *Now your artwork has a fairly detailed and textured black-and-white style, and it seems a very cinematic style. How do you approach doing your artwork?*

RON: Oh, well, how do I approach it. There's no real simple step-by-step answer. I guess I'd say that I approach the art — this may sound terribly hackneyed or whatever — but I really approach the jobs that I do by starting from the story first. When I'm working from somebody else's I'll try to very carefully read their plot or full script if I'm working that way, and try to pick out the most important aspects or elements from the whole story — you know, what's the whole tone supposed to be, or the intent — down to each individual panel and try to figure out what's the most important element that I should try to get across in each panel; as opposed to how can I create the most pretty looking page, which I think is a whole different thing than what comic storytelling is ideally about.

So I start from that. So if my work tends to look somewhat cinematic it's probably because I tend to as I'm reading the story

Pencil page from DC Comic's SUPERMAN (1985).



Superman TM & © 1986 DC Comics, Inc

"The first class had people like Bissette, Veitch & Yeates."

see a sequence that I think would probably come across working very *powerfully* or clearly or *effectively* that way. If I put a lot of detail in there I generally try to put it in for the purpose of enhancing the atmosphere of the story as I see it, or putting in detail that I think is necessary to get across something about the story. So I guess I tend to approach it that way.

ANDY: *Rather than putting in extraneous detail.*

RON: I try to avoid that although I suppose at one point or another I'd have to plead guilty to trying to maybe trick the eye into thinking it's more impressive than it actually is. *(Laughter.)* But I try not to do that, and I'm sure I stumble once in awhile.

ANDY: *Ron, you created TREKKER, which is creator owned, and you've also done quite a bit of work for hire for DC. How do you like working in both styles, what things work best for you in the two different styles?*

RON: Well, when you're doing stuff that's creator owned then obviously you're on top of it, you're sort of on the edge pretty much all of the time, you've got a lot invested in it. Especially on something like TREKKER where I was also writing it, there were a lot of reasons for the involvement that I put into TREKKER. But whichever way, whether it's work for hire or whether it's creator owned, whether you're working plot style or full script or whatever, if you've got a story that's fun to work on, a story that has me revved up, then I'll just sort of throw myself into it; and at the time that I'm doing the work I don't think, you know, about the terms that I'm doing this under, do you know what I mean. I'm just trying to get involved in the story, and if it's a story that's got a lot of stuff that is getting me revved up then that's all that really matters. *That's* what causes you to produce your work I think. That's the way it goes for me. And DC is now apparently instigating a new policy for creator ownership. I'm not sure of the specifics of it, though, but the impression of it that I had from just a memo that I read was it's no longer exclusively work for hire up at DC.

ANDY: *Right.*

RON: But of course the things that I have done for DC *have* been work for hire. I do enjoy owning TREKKER, I enjoy working that way. I'll put it this way, I think I've *definitely* put more of myself into TREKKER than anything that I've worked on in the past. I think that's due to a lot of factors, one is the great encouragement and the comfortable work

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environment that Mike and Randy have set up at Dark Horse, and the fact that it was all *my own* and I was writing it myself. But I definitely think that ownership was part of that deal. But still . . . You know, you have to take the attitude that this is the job you're doing, and be aware of what you do and don't control on it, and you just go about it and you do your best work that you can on it. I'm comfortable working that way if I know the score going in, so I don't have any real problems working work for hire But at the same time I definitely as a creator feel much closer to the work when it is my own thing.

ANDY: *Do you see yourself doing some more creator-owned projects or doing some more work for hire?*

RON: Frankly I expect to be doing a little bit of both as time goes on. I don't have any other new properties of my own that I'm sort of ready to push out on the marketplace yet, so I'll just wait and see what time has to say, see what turns up for me.

ANDY: *Besides your TREKKER stories for DARK HORSE PRESENTS, what other stories do you have coming up?*

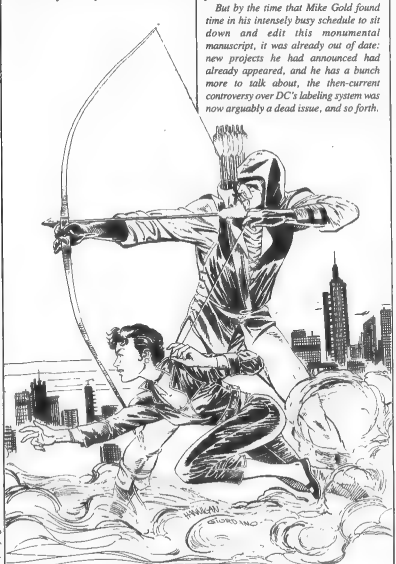
RON: Well, DRAGONLANCE as I mentioned, I'm pencilling and inking with a lot of good background help on that by a young fellow named **Randy Elliot** who lives back in New York. So I'll be doing the first four issues of DRAGONLANCE, the first issue is due out in August. Beyond that it looks like I'm going to be doing a 40-page TREKKER SPECIAL in color for Comico Comics this time. And beyond that the crystal ball is not telling me. *(Laughter.)* So I'll see what happens.

"People seem to have forgotten who did the 1st graphic novel."

MIKE GOLD

Long, long ago, back in November, 1986, I conducted the first interview for this magazine with Mike Gold and his wife Ann DeLarye-Gold. Mike, of course, is now Director of Development and a Senior Editor at DC Comics and was a founder and editor at First Comics. He and Ann had major roles in running the Chicago Comicon, one of the nation's biggest and most important comics conventions, for its first decade.

But by the time that Mike Gold found time in his intensely busy schedule to sit down and edit this monumental manuscript, it was already out of date: new projects he had announced had already appeared, and he has a bunch more to talk about, the then-current controversy over DC's labeling system was now arguably a dead issue, and so forth.



Whatever was to be done? Well, we simply did it all over again, once we found a weekend this spring on which both Mike and Ann were in town. This interview is only roughly half as long as the first, and while we do cover some of the same questions that we did in the initial interview, we couldn't go back over everything. So you'll have to wait for the Gold's biographies, should they ever be written, to learn (1) how Mike developed an immunity to two different forms of nerve gas, (2) how he became a public information officer for the Chicago 7 defendants (3) about Ann's former ambition to be a nun, (4) how Mike got his job at DC (both times), (5) why he left First Comics, and (6) the Meaning of Life.

--Peter Sanderson

PETER: *Last year one of the things you said in the interview was that comics have gotten a lot of publicity due to DARK KNIGHT and AMERICAN SPLENDOR and MAN OF STEEL.*

MIKE: Right.

PETER: *You speculated that this wave of publicity might possibly be a fad and not really a foundation for more serious attention devoted to comics on a more permanent basis by the mass media. Do you think that it has proven to be a fad?*

MIKE: Well, I still have my reservations. In a sense I'm *gratified* to see some bad reviews in the so-called straight press — I've seen one or two bad reviews of WATCHMEN, PUBLISHERS WEEKLY did sort of a bad review of **Eisner's** latest book LIFE FORCE — because you don't take something seriously . . . if it's comic books you can't say it's bad because it's comic books and comic books *are* bad, you're being redundant, so if you actually have a critical analysis that says this is bad because of *this* then you're taking something a little bit more seriously. Obviously I disagreed with those two, I liked WATCHMEN a *whole* lot and **Will Eisner** can't do *anything* wrong in my eyes, but I think that sort of mitigates against my concern that it might be perceived as a fad. I don't know if it's a

All art accompanying this interview is © 1986 DC Comics, Inc., unless otherwise noted

"If it's comic books you can't say it's bad because it's comic

VITAL STATISTICS

Names: Michael Gold, Ann Elizabeth DeLarye-Gold
Place and Date of Birth: (Mike) Chicago, IL, 4 August 1950; (Ann) Chicago, IL, 19 November, 1955
Occupations: (Mike) Director of Development and Senior Editor, DC Comics; (Ann) Vice President, Institute for International Research
Credits: (Both) With others, founded and organized Chicago Comicon, 1976-1986; (Mike) Free-lance writer, reporter, public information officer for Chicago 7 Defense Committee, radio show host and personality, social services worker, Publicity and Public Relations Director for DC Comics, co-founder and editor of First Comics; (Ann) Director of Communications for the Central Educational Network, free-lance writer, various amateur theatrical work
Favorite Authors: (Mike) Damon Runyan, Rex Stout
Favorite Books: (Ann) Anything by Kahil Gibran, I'm ashamed to say, but I love his stuff, it's so beautiful
Favorite Movies: (Mike) THE THIRD MAN BRAZIL (Ann) THE YEAR OF LIVING DANGEROUSLY, THE WIZARD OF OZ
Favorite Principal Means of Having Fun: (Mike) I don't think you can print it (Ann) Reading and exotic bathing
Least Favorite Thing to Do: (Ann) Housework; (Mike) Deadlines
Ultimate Goal in Life: (Mike) Making it through the week alive (Ann) Having an obituary in THE NEW YORK TIMES

fad or not, I hope not; part of it depends on what *we* do, not just DC but everybody in the comics community.

However, the difference in the past year has been Superman's 50th birthday. It's very hard to treat Superman as anything more than a "fun" event. You know, you might take SUPERMAN COMICS seriously, or comic books seriously, but Superman as an entity, there's just too much fun associated with Superman to present him 100% seriously to the mass public. For example, I wasn't very upset by the **Lorne Michaels** produced Superman TV tribute, *most* people on staff at DC were not very upset by it — I *know* a lot of the hard-core fans were — because it was a TV show about this character and we didn't particularly see it as putting down the character very much. I think if that Superman tribute were done ten years ago you would have gotten a BATMAN TV show. Those people who feel it *was* the BATMAN TV show haven't *seen* that TV show for a long time. You know, they wouldn't have wasted any of their time with interviews with people like **John Byrne**, or references to people like **Siegel and Shuster**, they would have *solely* talked about ZAP, SPLASH, BAM and that sort of stuff.

PETER: *Just over the past year I've noticed the great impact of comics going into the bookstores.*

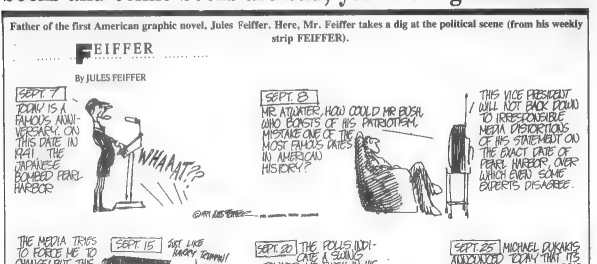
MIKE: Yeah, but that still could be a fad, it's a question of whether they will be there five years from now. Video games was the big fad for three or four years and then it disappeared, and it's sort of come back; will it disappear again, who knows. Everybody always talked about the hula hoop as a fad, but the hula hoop has endured. There was never a point in time since the hula hoop was introduced that you couldn't go into most major toy stores and find a hula hoop.

ANN: I bought a hula hoop about three years ago.

MIKE: That's right. I hope it's not a fad, obviously, but if it's *not* a fad it will be because we have done stuff *better* than just doing a couple of terrific Batman stories. We will start doing some terrific stories that aren't superheroish at all, and also aren't overly . . . political, because **Jules Feiffer** has been doing that stuff for over 30 years in his newspaper strip and also in paperbacks and in hardcovers. **Feiffer**

books and comic books are bad, you're being redundant."

Father of the first American graphic novel, Jules Feiffer. Here, Mr. Feiffer takes a dig at the political scene (from his weekly strip FEIFFER).


FEIFFER
By JULES FEIFFER
SEPT. 7
TODAY IS A FAMOUS ANNIVERSARY. ON THIS DATE IN 1941 THE JAPANESE BOMBED PEARL HARBOR
WHAAAT...?
©1987 JULES FEIFFER — All Rights Reserved
SEPT. 13
MR. ATWATER, HOW COULD MR BUSH, WHO BOASTS OF HIS PATRIOTISM, MISTAKE ONE OF THE MOST FAMOUS DATES IN AMERICAN HISTORY?
THE VICE PRESIDENT WILL NOT BACK DOWN TO IRRESPONSIBLE MEDIA DISTORTIONS OF HIS STATEMENT ON THE EXACT DATE OF PEARL HARBOR. OVER WHICH EVEN SOME EXPERTS DISAGREE.
THE MEDIA TRIES TO FORCE ME TO CHANGE! BUT THIS VETERAN KNOWS IN HIS HEART WHAT IS RIGHT. SO DON'T LET THE LIBERALS CURSE YOU OH PEARL HARBOR!
SEPT 15
JUST LIKE HARRY TRUMAN!
SEPT. 20
THE POLLS INDICATE A SOLIDLY TOUGHEST MR BUSH IN HIS BATTLE WITH THE MEDIA OVER PEARL HARBOR
SEPT. 25
MICHAEL DUKAKIS ANNOUNCED TODAY THAT IT'S TIME TO PUT THE PEARL HARBOR CONTROVERSY BEHIND US AND HAS ACCEPTED SEPT 7, 1941, TO BE ACCURATE.

FEIFFER © 1988 Jules Feiffer/U.P.S

did a graphic novel eight years ago called TANTRUM that most people seem to have forgotten when they talk about who did the first American graphic novel.

ANN: What about Neanderthal cave drawings?

MIKE: Well, yeah, sure, but we're talking not about the roots of the medium itself. You know, we have to go *beyond* just all of the types of things that have been done, we have to break new ground, additional ground. In Europe there were HAGAR THE HORRIBLE graphic novels, original stories, 44 or whatever pages long, but that doesn't really break any new ground. And the fact that HAGAR is in 1,000 newspapers doesn't mean that it is going to be perceived as anything more adult if you do it in a graphic novel. We have to start doing things that really haven't been done before. What makes MAUS so unique is not **Artie Spiegelman**'s talent, which has amazed me for 20 years, but the fact that it has the ambiance, to somebody who knows nothing about the medium or about **Spiegelman**, of being autobiographical. That's an element that we haven't seen in comics before, and those are the types of elements that are going to help make the medium appear to be more legitimate.

PETER: *When we last spoke you had been at DC less than a year.*

MIKE: Yes.

PETER: *The current incarnation.*

MIKE: Yes. My current incarnation or DC's?

PETER: *Yours*

MIKE: Okay. *(Laughter.)*

PETER: *You had already introduced quite a number of projects under your editorship, the new FLASH, the new DOOM PATROL, WASTELAND, SONIC DISRUPTERS was coming up. First of all how do you feel this first wave of books that you helped bring to DC have fared? Have they succeeded in fulfilling what you hoped they would accomplish?*

MIKE: Let me talk about THE FLASH and GREEN ARROW together because they deal with the same thing in somewhat different ways. FLASH deals with a kid who's 20, and we're dealing with him as we would deal with any 20-year-old who grew up having super powers and all of a sudden has both a tremendous amount of money and a certain degree of freedom — and sort of a heritage, his mentor had died. That has been very very well received. It is arguably DC's third bestselling book. GREEN ARROW *also* deals with rites of passage — he's arguably DC's oldest superhero. I mean he's the only superhero that could be perceived as being a grandfather, because his ward has a child. We had him sort of clean up his act a little bit, have a certain mid-life crisis, propose marriage to Black Canary, abandon the trick arrows, and take his life a little bit more seriously. That is DC's best or second best revenue generating ongoing book based upon comic book retail dollars. So obviously I feel very good about that.

I think the books are very good and obviously people are responding to them in great numbers. You don't need to have a book be that successful, in terms of a lot of people buy them, if there's an aesthetic success. There's a lot of cult classics out there, one of my favorite comics over the last ten years is STIG'S INFERNO. I am *extremely* satisfied with WASTELAND. It's *very* warped, it has all of the black humor elements in it that I had hoped for. I think that it inspired its artists to do work that was very unique and very different. It takes **John Ostrander**, who's co-writing with **Del Close**, as long to write a 9-page story as it does for him to write a whole issue by himself of a superhero comic, so clearly he'd be making money faster if he weren't doing WASTELAND, yet I don't think he'd give it up if you beat him over the head. I feel extremely *privileged* to be working on THE QUESTION, which is a book that is doing okay in terms of sales, it's certainly not in the top ten.

ANN: But it gets the best letters.

MIKE: Yeah, the mail on it is phenomenal. The reason why I feel privileged is because in my teenage years **Denny O'Neil** was writing BATMAN, and in my late teens he was writing

ON THE QUESTION: "Denys Cowan and Rick Magyar

GREEN LANTERN/GREEN ARROW, and today there's this perception that his work on THE QUESTION is as good as that, and some people say better. It's just awesome for me to be able to be a part of that. **Denys Cowan** and **Rick Magyar** have done the best work of their careers on that book.

PETER: *Something we talked about the last time, that the Stan Lee and Jack Kirby creations started about the same time as the Beatles —*

MIKE: Had the same type of energy as rock'n'roll at the time, absolutely.

PETER: *And how they both pushed to the edge finding new styles.*

MIKE: Absolutely. The lack of commercial success on SONIC DISRUPTORS hasn't changed my philosophy any.

ANN: Who's the audience for SONIC DISRUPTORS?

MIKE: Well, we didn't know, that's why we went out and did it.

PETER: *Possibly the audience is out there, it hasn't been reached.*

MIKE: It's quite possible. There were some problems in terms of promoting SONIC DISRUPTORS — we were having legal problems with certain people who mistakenly perceived themselves as being exploited by the series. If SONIC was released as one 200i-page graphic novel, you know, it would probably have had a better chance of finding a better audience. I liked the book, and part of my job is to go out there and do things that haven't really been done before — I mean that's part of every editor's job at DC, but as Director of Development I have been specifically charged with screwing around like that, it's just such a wonderful job.

PETER: *I was struck rereading the old interview about the comparison of rock music to comics. Rock, when it is viable, is moving in new directions, or re-animating old directions.*

MIKE: Rock'n'roll is a huge field, it encompasses a million different types of music — as far as I'm concerned rock'n'roll started with ragtime and went on to swing and ultimately wound up being what we today — and in rock, and what's perceived as rock music, there's always been a very strong element of not just avant-garde but totally wacko.

PETER: *And there's always been an element of the rebel.*

MIKE: Absolutely. SONIC DISRUPTORS was to be a comic-book version of **The Dead Kennedys.** In issue #7 probably my favorite reference — I have *no* idea how Mike Baron got into this, I asked him about it and he really couldn't tell me — was at one point in the storyline Mike managed to work in a sort of a tribute to the incident where **Dan Rather** was attacked and beat up, which is one of the most surreal bizarre incidents of all time. It was really *interesting* that Mike would be able to encompass that type of element into the story. It's a wonderful book. I'm not surprised that it isn't doing better, whereas I am surprised that WASTELAND is doing as well as it is. I didn't think WASTELAND would be around six issues, *maybe* six issues, maybe eight, and by the time this interview's published maybe it'll be gone, but at least it's gone this far.

DOOM PATROL we got trick-bagged — we trick-bagged ourselves. I'm not happy about my own work on it; that was a start-up project for me, it wasn't a book that I had a long-term commitment to. It was very clear that there was a lot of anticipation for DOOM PATROL, and the characters were very odd. The trick bag was that people on the one hand really love the old characters, the original Doom Patrol, and on the other hand the reason why they loved them was because they got killed off. So what do you do? You bring back the old characters then you're leaving yourself open for the people that would really be annoyed because you're bringing them back, because it really is a deceit. Do you just use the newer characters? Do you develop some more new characters? What we did was all of the above — we made sure people understood that one of the old characters was absolutely dead, another one was fairly severely changed, and we sort of started it off with a quest to see whether the others were alive or dead. That was a mistake. If I had to do it all over again I would have strongly pushed the book in a different direction, an *absolute* revival starting from day 1 as if there never had been a Doom Patrol before, recreate the old group in more

have done the best work of their careers on that book."

contemporary terms, and even incorporate a couple of the characters from the later days as well perhaps, along the way. Valentina is a fascinating character. But, like I said, it was absolutely trick-bagged.

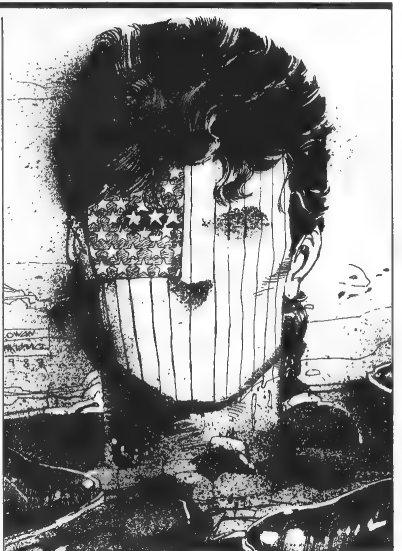
PETER: *In DC's revival and revamping of the classic characters, what determines whether they should be more or less left alone as was Batman, whether there should be a rethinking as with the Flash, or a complete revamping as with Superman and Wonder Woman?*

MIKE: It depends on where you are. I think Superman *needed* the revamping desperately. It had 48 years of contradictory baggage, and a *lot* of that baggage was by contemporary terms very very silly. The hard-core fans were annoyed by the 1960s Luthor origin, I understand where that comes from. I was about eleven years old when that origin story was printed for the first time in ADVENTURE COMICS, and *I* was pissed off then! That was a dreadful story. "Luthor is Superman's arch enemy because of *this?* This is crazy!"

PETER: *But then you get in trouble for killing off Supergirl.*

MIKE: Yeah, you're screwed either way. Killing off Supergirl got more mail than there were people that bought the book. But I think it was right to draw a big thick line around the previous work and say we are going to start over and make a few changes — and really very few — and reintroduce the classic elements one at a time in an order and provide a direction for the series from there. I like that. I think that has been by and large very successful.

And with Wonder Woman . . . you know, nobody really *cared* about Wonder Woman since the end of World War II. What people forget is that in the 1940s Wonder Woman was one of the very most successful comics characters. She was in three different books, she had her own newspaper strip, she had everything but a movie serial. But if you sat down and talked to like ten people on the street and said, "Who is Superman?" They would say, "He's Clark Kent, this Kryptonian." "Who is Batman?" "He's this guy that dresses up funny and has this neat car and drives around bashing up weird looking villains." At least they'd say that. "Who is Wonder Woman?" "Well, she's this woman with big breasts who fights crime." They'd think about **Lynda Carter** perhaps, but they'd know *nothing* about the character itself. What George did was he *studied* the character and he uncovered what makes her unique. I think it's great. It's a book I had nothing to do with but I have the privilege of reading it. It's terrific!



With the Flash it's another matter. The Flash had a *legacy* that wasn't contradictory! In effect there already was this big thick red line around it, there was the first Flash, there was the second Flash. The first Flash was sort of retired and went off to Valhalla, kind of, so he's sort of dead.

ANN: Sort of dead?

MIKE: Well, sort of dead, yeah. It's comic books, nobody's *really* dead in comics — except Barry Allen. If somebody brings back Barry Allen . . . well, they're not gonna do it, at least not for awhile. Barry Allen was killed dead, period, that's it. Not only that but he had three years of horrible humiliation going against him *before* he was killed dead, period. There was just no way in the world that you could say he was left in any sort of viable condition. He was dead, he was humiliated, he couldn't be *anything* after that.

PETER: *You're not saying the character couldn't be brought back, you're saying the character after these three years of stories was no longer viable.*

MIKE: Right, absolutely. But all the way along the heir to the throne was there, his nephew had the powers. He was a kid but it was *clear* that he was one of the older members of the Teen Titans. I think **Marv Wolfman** took pains, at least in CRISIS if not so much in TITANS, to illustrate that — him and Speedy — you sort of figured that out. Maybe Nightwing was a little older, maybe not, it's hard to tell because you get the feeling that Dick Grayson acted that mature when he was

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COMICS INTERVIEW

"DOOM PATROL we got trick-bagged - we trick-bagged ourselves."

twelve. *(Laughter.)* So we could actually capitalize on that, we could just spin him out of the group — no pun intended — and *play* with the fact that he was a budding adult, and that's what we've done.

PETER: *And perhaps you didn't feel that it was essential to the concept of the Flash, what made the Flash work and how it existed with Barry Allen, whereas you can't really take Bruce Wayne out of Batman.*

MIKE: Right, absolutely. Well, Bruce Wayne possibly . . . I think that you could have killed off Bruce Wayne at some point of time and had Dick Grayson take over as Batman: I think only *half* of the fans would kill you for that, the other half might think it was an interesting idea. Clark Kent, you're dead, everybody kills you. You can't mess with Clark.

PETER: *I disagree about Batman because of the motivation.*

MIKE: Yeah, but you see Robin's origin, Dick Grayson's origin —

PETER: *Not quite as strong.*

MIKE: That's true, but what Dick Grayson has is a heritage, the heritage of Bruce Wayne, which is something that Bruce Wayne didn't have, and he would be less neurotic now if he had, or less obsessed. Mind you I'm not advocating this at all.

PETER: *I think everybody likes the obsessed Batman.*

MIKE: I'm not advocating this at all, I'm just saying what in all possible worlds . . . you wouldn't get hurt as bad because there is this sort of connection with Dick Grayson. With Wally West, hey, we had it wide open. What's interesting is that at the end of CRISIS we had Wally West saying, "Okay, I'm the Flash." But he hadn't come to grips with *being* the Flash, and what we still had coming out of CRISIS was the redefinition of his power, his power had been reduced. In the next crossover series, INVASION — we've started this actually in THE FLASH, it starts in issue #14 — Wally West has lost his money and his power, and he doesn't feel like particularly necessarily getting them back. So it's interesting. The character of the Flash has been the mainstay of these crossover mini-series, CRISIS, LEGENDS — maybe not MILLENNIUM. That's kind of interesting.

PETER: *When you decide to retool a series, as it were, how do you pick out what is the essence of FLASH, say, or THE QUESTION or THE DOOM PATROL? Is there something about the essence of a series that goes beyond just the powers the lead characters have?*

MIKE: Well . . . I started to say people don't care about super powers, that is not a justifiable statement. But you don't pick up FLASH because, "Oh, this is neat, it's about a guy who runs fast!" You may think, "Oh, this guy runs fast, that's kind of interesting, let's see what they *do* with it." But you don't pick it up just because he runs fast. I don't think historically that there are characters that you pick up just because their super power is interesting. It's *just* what they do, it's almost irrelevant. It's *how* that may have an impact on their private lives, on them as individuals, on them as human beings. If tomorrow morning Wally West was to push a button and no longer run fast but would maybe turn invisible, it wouldn't change the book a hell of a lot because it doesn't change Wally West: it's still the same person who is a superhero with super

"In the late '60s, post TV show, and early '70s the Batman in BRAVE

powers and that has a certain influence on his life.

Superman is a goddamn institution. You can't talk about Superman within that context. But I think one of the reasons why Batman has endured for the last 50 years is the fact that he doesn't have super powers. I mean there are probably a couple of fans who wish they were as obsessed as Batman, but I don't want to meet them. By and large it's that accessibility — it's like if you had the proper motivation and training and the world was a place where it was okay for you to be a vigilante and be dressed up silly, you know, you *could* do it. It's possible, you *could* do it. That's the main thing about Batman. It's not that he drives a nifty car, he has a batarang, he hangs out with his boy. *(Laughter.)*

PETER: *Yes, in a sense what you say about Batman is true, but throughout the whole history of the character it has been defined differently in different decades.*

MIKE: But it has always been defined differently *within* eras. In the late '60s, post TV show, and early 70s the Batman in BRAVE AND BOLD was not the same

Batman + vampirism + Gene Colan = this unpublished (detail) BATMAN #351 cover, 1982.

Batman in BATMAN or in DETECTIVE COMICS. Today, 1988, the Batman in JUSTICE LEAGUE INTERNATIONAL is not really the same Batman that's in DETECTIVE COMICS, and he's not the guy in KILLING JOKE. It's a different guy.

PETER: *But they're not completely unconnected. There's this sort of wide area which has been Batman's range for 50 years.*

MIKE: Right

PETER: *The cheerier side has been emphasized at moments, and at other moments the darker side has been emphasized, but it's still all there.*

MIKE: Right.

PETER: *But I'm wondering when the premise of a hero is delved into whether there is an attempt to define this kind of*

From left to right, four other versions of the nocturnal crime fighter THE BATMAN. Here, Neal Adams displays the emotion of fear, while Frank Miller shadow plays...

AND BOLD was not the same Batman in BATMAN or in D.C.."

air and style and so on apart from the particular costume and powers — what guides you and others in deciding how to define or redefine a character?

MIKE: Keep in mind that there are some superheroes that do nothing but deal with some sort of theme, liberation or whatever. It's an interesting thing.

PETER: *Well, THE QUESTION, for example, Steve Ditko's politics are obviously very different from Denny O'Neil's politics, but still even though the two QUESTION series are different as far as that goes, the enigmatic figure who fights crime and asks questions is something that has stayed the same.*

MIKE: Right. We worked out a continuity hole for that, which I hope will never be filled in, by the way. It's very clear that a *considerable* amount of time passed between the end of the **Ditko** stories and the beginning of the **O'Neil** stories. Fans, if they want to — and that's part of the fun of comics fandom — you could look back and say, "Well, something happened to Vic Sage during that period of time, or maybe a series of events happened to Vic Sage, that caused

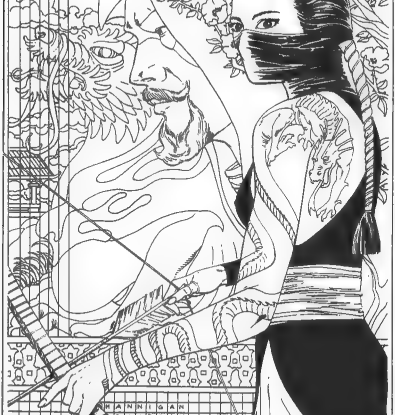
Bats by Rogers & Austin

him to go on this philosophical quest, and the first questions that he asked were about his own philosophy, and maybe he sort of moved away from objectivism to just this quest for answers." That's not illogical. We have no intention of revealing what may have happened during that period of time, unless Denny has thought of something just in the past moment — we haven't worked anything out — but you don't have to say that there's a contradiction there.

In the case of the Black Canary it's a greater problem, because there have been so many contradictory versions of Black Canary over the years, and there have been so many continuity patches to explain that stuff away — there's the Earth 1 Black Canary, the Earth 2 Black Canary, oops, no more Earth 2, well, it's this daughter — it would be real silly if you were to approach it from the perspective of here's this character today. It's very hard to explain it without doing the whole tree. So what we've done is fairly obvious, or it should be fairly obvious now that the new Black Canary series has premiered in ACTION. LONGBOW HUNTERS took place after her departure from the Justice League, and the woman who is a little bit more whimsical and had *some* super powers that were always very ill defined, was literally traumatized out of both. The underlying theme in LONGBOW HUNTERS was about how we deal with victims in our society, so there's a certain continuity flow there. It makes no more or less sense than anything

... moving forward in time, we take a glimpse of Berni Wrightson and Mike Mignola's versions.

"You can't have the 14-year-olds coming in and sitting with a group



else that happened to the character, including the being her own daughter stuff, but if you want to work it out it's there for you. It can be worked out there, you don't have to say it's a different character. There's no need to draw that thick red line I was talking about as with Superman and Wonder Woman.

Green Lantern was somewhat like the Flash, you could always have a new Green Lantern. What we learned during the waning days of GREEN LANTERN CORPS was that there's a *limit* to how many of those different Green Lanterns you can have at any one moment of time — a group of people who dress alike and have the same super power is interesting only for a short length of time. So we decided to go back and explore what Hal Jordan was all about. But again there was no need to draw that line, we could just take the story somewhere else. We could have just as easily taken it in a different direction, because of the history. Most people lost interest in GREEN LANTERN CORPS outside of Guy Gardner.

PETER: *But the question was why do you decide to, say, do this new series with the Question rather than create a new character? What's the difference between creating a new character and changing a character?*

MIKE: First, with the Question we don't really feel that we've *changed* anything, we've just identified a certain period of time where we don't really know what happened to the character. We didn't make *that* the story; we made the story out of what happens afterwards. We could have gone out and created a brand new character, but it would have been a rip-off of the Question because it was the Question we wanted to do. We wanted to do a story about this guy who had this quest, who had this deep need to discover answers, and not just answers like who and what but answers about the human condition. He was already working in one of the most corrupt cities known to man, as we point out in the series. So *given* the parameters that we had and the fact that it all *started* with the idea of let's do the Question, it made sense to *do* the Question. We took the elements that were there and we took them in our own direction. You don't have to go and ape somebody else's style, you do that for a fill-in. If it's a series that you're creating then you're going to do your own thing. We took the Question in a different direction based upon how we felt the character created by **Ditko** would respond differently given this choice and this choice

PETER: *Okay, I'm going to switch gears here. Ann, as a person who was greatly involved in running the Chicago Comicon, what kind of changes have you observed in all of the conventions over this time, in terms of how they are run?*

ANN: Well, the last couple of years I have deliberately tried to stay a lot around the pool just so that I can congratulate myself for not running around and being crazy. But across the board, there's generally more of a sense of business and a more developed slickness about what takes place at comics conventions — they're just better run generally. The companies *certainly* read them as a much more important part of their business than they did when the first couple of Comicons were going.

MIKE: We had no liaisons with the companies back in '76.

ANN: That's right, there was no public relations or marketing at all. Now you've got whole departments devoted to that, with multiple staff members. The negotiations became increasingly difficult for getting guests, and what you have to give to get. The companies started holding the convention producers more accountable for the kinds of results in terms of sales and exposure. Conventioneering just kept getting more professional to the point where it lost some of its fun behind the scenes. It became much more stressful.

PETER: *Have the atmospheres changed not just behind the scenes but up front in a way? Is there something less of the sense of this being a hobby now, do you think?*

ANN: Well, yeah, because the attendees are older. It's a lot more inbred now; you don't talk about stuff with a sense of wonder anymore, you talk about it with a sense of seriousness. It gets very convoluted and only a certain group of people can even talk to each other now. You can't have the 14-year-olds coming in and sitting with a group of fans and feeling *comfortable* now, the talk will be completely beyond them. There are strata of fandom that are forming. The older fans are, the more heavily exclusive.

PETER: *Do you notice this, say, even in the panel questions that people get from the audience? Have they changed over the years?*

# of fans and feeling comfortable now, the talk will be beyond them."

ANN: Well, Michael would have to answer that because I rarely had the time to attend panels very much, you know. I was always running around trying to get the air conditioning turned up higher. *(Laughter.)*

MIKE: Yes and no. There are conventions and there are conventions. When we would go to conventions in New York, the questions would have a lot less sense of wonder because the people at the New York conventions weren't so awestruck by seeing these great talents, whoever the great talent might have been at that moment. If **Neal Adams** walked into the room the people in New York wouldn't be surprised and they would ask Neal anything they wanted. But if Neal walked into the room in Chicago in 1976, there would be more of that sense of wonder. At smaller conventions where the guests are even more accessible, the questions would start off with that feeling and then get detailed very quickly. Those are wonderful shows, I love doing small conventions. That was true 20 years ago and it was true ten years ago, and it's true today.

ANN: The only place I see that kind of energy now is at store appearances.

MIKE: That's true, that's *very* true. It's a matter of accessibility. I don't like going to Big Huge Comic-Book Conventions because I don't learn as much from them. You know, at the Chicago Comicon there's 120 guests and there's 6,000 people every day, and on Sunday there'll be 4,000 people who weren't there on Friday, and San Diego is the same but I'm there doing business. There are panels, you sit at the table, all of that stuff, and it's great but it's very limited: you can't

Still going strong, The Teen Titans. Here, a pencil piece from 1985 by Jose Luis Garcia Lopez.

"In San Diego it seems like about 80%

spend enough time with each person. I just came back from Brandeis University last week; I try to do three or four shows every year where there are 1,000 people or less, plus as many store appearances as I can fit in, because it's the only place where I get that direct personal feedback. Once they get past that sense of wonder stuff you were talking about, they're willing to say, "Hey, look, I don't like this because . . ." I can learn from that, and I can say, "Well, gee, that's interesting. I didn't realize that so many of you don't like *this*. What if we did *that?*" And then they say, "Yeah, that's interesting, why don't you play with that," or, "Nah, that's stupid, why don't you just kill it." *(Laughter.)*

PETER: *Whereas at a big convention everybody lines up at the DC table, say, and everybody gets only 15 seconds just because of the sheer amount of people.*

MIKE: Right, absolutely, and fans only have that DC interplay — they go to the DC table to talk to DC people about DC things, even if these are people who also work with Marvel or with Eclipse. That writer goes over to the Eclipse table two hours later and fans talk to him about Eclipse stuff there. That's very cold. As a working comics professional I always preferred the Chicago Minicons to the Chicago Comicon, because the Minicons are 1,000 people or less and I can sit down and talk to them and learn stuff. You know, I go out to a show in Minneapolis or a show in Kansas City or someplace like that, I'll have lunch or dinner with fans and we'll really *talk* about things, and I walk away having learned some things. I hope that they do too.

ANN: That was the way you described your store appearances in Alaska.

MIKE: Oh, that was fabulous, that was one of the greatest things that ever happened to me.

PETER: *And of course the store appearances take you places where people aren't accustomed to seeing comics professionals.*

ANN: And *that's* the thing you don't get at the larger comics conventions anymore because everybody's accustomed to it.

MIKE: There's also a certain percentage of the same guests. For example in San Diego it seems like about 80% of the guest list is the same every year. If you looked at it for a ten year period that wouldn't be true, but looking from one year to the next it is. In Chicago that's getting to be true, primarily because there are so many Midwest writers and artists now. So the fans who go there every year *know* they're going to see *X, Y and Z* every year, and they may like that. But, you know, if

Retail poster from DC's Denys Cowan (rough sketch).

you've seen **Chris Claremont** at San Diego every year for the last five or ten years, or **Dick Giordano** or **Mike Gold** in Chicago or anybody —

ANN: Forget the sense of wonder.

MIKE: Yeah.

ANN: It's another kind of experience. It's not any worse or any better, it's just another kind of experience. I wonder if the kind of experience you got at the first couple of Comicons can ever be repeated. It just may be a lost era.

MIKE: I think you can, I just don't think you can do it in the tremendous huge shows. I'm not sure.

PETER: *But the people who go, say, to the Chicago Comicon for the very first time, it's still exciting for them to see all these people for the very first time.*

ANN: I still see people walk into the show with their mouths open. Maybe I haven't been looking for them; there may be more than I thought.

PETER: *Maybe they seek out other people like themselves, beginners, rather than the seasoned veterans.*

ANN: Well, I would think that, for a first time attendee to the Chicago Comicon, it would be easy to be overwhelmed. I could see people getting a little set back.

of the guest list is the same every year."

MIKE: The *need* for a comic-book convention has changed over the years, it's changed radically. In the late '60s through maybe '78 you would go to a comic-book convention because there were very very few real comic-book stores and that was the way that you would find old comics. When you got into those original comic-book conventions it was like everything was new, because there was no safe harbor for a comic-book fan. There weren't very many comic-book stores where you could just go, so you'd go to the convention and for one day, two days, three days, four days you'd be overwhelmed with comics. Today you can do that anytime during reasonable working hours by going into a comic-book store, presuming you're near one of the x-thousand comic-book stores that are around.

ANN: So now fans go to find the rare stuff that the local shops don't carry. Their tastes go a little bit beyond the neighborhood tastes. And a lot of fans now seem to come knocking on the door professionally. They come with their portfolios and their writing samples.

PETER: *Oh, yes. At the last convention I went to about all I saw were people going around the tables with their portfolios.*

ANN: Yeah. There's no sense of wonder there.

PETER: *But in the kinds of questions that get asked during panels is there an edge of, say, cynicism?*

ANN: I wouldn't call that cynicism, I'd call it a decrease of hero-worship towards professionals. If you want cynicism give 'em another ten years.

MIKE: I think whatever cynicism there may be is due to overexposure. I would find it just as interesting to go into a convention in, say, Portland and see a lot of the writers and artists who are up in *that* area, and meet with the people from Dark Horse. It's so different from the Comico/DC/Marvel/East Coast type of thing, or the Eclipse/Blackthorne/DC/Marvel/West Coast, or the Kitchen Sink/Now/First/DC/Marvel Midwest. I can go out somewhere where you're just totally removed from the *overwhelming* force of the biggest publisher, and you have some potential there for a good time. This is borderline "fandom fandom," where one is a fan of being a fan, and gets nostalgic for the old 'zines and the conventions where maybe 800 people would show up.

ANN: And you thought that was the *end* of the *world*!

MIKE: **Gardner Fox** would be there and you couldn't *believe* it, nor could **Gardner Fox** for crying out loud! *(Laughter.)* He didn't believe there would be 800 people there who would be interested in what *he* would have to say.

PART TWO... NEXT ISSUE!

"You're in disguise, nobody can see your face,

DAWN GEIGER

All right, maybe we should have run more photos of Dawn on these pages, but if we did, then you'd miss out on the real reason for this interview — her personality. That's right, Dawn Geiger's beauty is not just skin deep. She's charming, witty, sharp, artistic — one of the keystones of the Marvel Bullpen.

Dawn started her career at Marvel working as a freelancer in the production department. It wasn't long before she went on staff as an assistant designer. Now she's the co-designer of MARVEL AGE, the designer of trade paperbacks and just about everything else Marvel publishes, and is also a Marvel superheroine model. What is it like for a young woman who grew up not *reading Marvel comics to be working at the House of Ideas and to be wearing the colorful costumes of some of its famous creations? Her answers to those, and other questions, make this one of the most fun interviews I ever conducted . . .*

DWIGHT JON ZIMMERMAN: *I'm talking with Dawn Geiger, the designer of MARVEL AGE, portrayer of Spider-Woman —*

DAWN GEIGER: And Firestar!

DWIGHT: *Who also does an awful lot of production work here in the Bullpen. She's also the wife of Steve Geiger, an artist who gained fame in SECTAURS, who also drew some SPIDER-MAN stories*

DAWN: And HULK.

DWIGHT: *When we first met you were doing cover mechanicals, was that your first job?*

DAWN: First job at Marvel?

DWIGHT: *Yes.*

DAWN: No. I was interviewed first with **Danny Crespi**, I showed him my portfolio, and shortly thereafter he went into the hospital and they needed a lot of help and **Ron Zalme** asked me to come in. So I started free-lancing here for quite awhile, and then a position opened up and he offered me a paste-up mechanical position. So that's how I started.

DWIGHT: *Had you been doing mechanicals before you came to New York?*

DAWN: Yes.

DWIGHT: *And . . . Steve came first to Marvel, didn't he?*

DAWN: Right.

DWIGHT: *And you're not really a comic-book fan, are you?*

DAWN: No, I'm not. *(Laughter.)* Before I came here I never read *one* Marvel comic magazine, comic book, whatever. I was into ARCHIE. I was into MAD MAGAZINE, but I'm not really a big fan of the superhero thing, that's just not my style. The books that I *do* read now are all Epic books, the more adult books. Like

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Dawn Geiger
Born: 25 September 1962 — Buffalo, NY
Current Residence: Brooklyn, NY
First Modeling Assignment: Wow, I don't even remember
What Does For Marvel: Designer of MARVEL AGE, shared with Cindy Kruhm; Mechanicals; Production Work; Superheroine Model
Favorite Color: Purple
Measurements: Do you want real vital statistics — 36-24-36, I'm very proud of that

you can get crazy, do whatever you want."

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COMICS INTERVIEW

"Before I came here I never read one Marvel comic."

BLOOD, I loved BLOOD, and ELEKTRA is my favorite — well, **Bill Sienkiewicz** is my favorite artist.

DWIGHT: *So was it Steve's desire to work for Marvel why you moved to New York?*

DAWN: Yeah. Boy, that was a fiasco. Okay, Steve interned here for a summer — he got a job really quickly because he is a great artist. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *No bias on your part.* (Laughter.)

DAWN: He got work really quickly and they said it would be beneficial to him to be in the area, to get more work. My parents wouldn't let us move down here and live together so we had to get married, so in that three-month period I *rushed* around getting things for a marriage. We got married and like a week later we moved down here. It was a shock just moving to New York in itself.

DWIGHT: *I'll bet.*

DAWN: I mean we drove down in a truck with Steve's friend and they *left*, they had to drive the truck back that night, and he said, "Keep a knife underneath the mattress just in case anybody comes in." Well, all during the night I had all these *dreams*. Well here, I'm a girl from Buffalo, suburbia, and . . .

Dawn's fave illustrator, Bill Sienkiewicz. . .

© Bill Sienkiewicz

DWIGHT: *Now you're in the heart of the beast.*

DAWN: Yeah, and I was *petrified*. I wouldn't go out of the house. We bought a pizza that day and I had it for breakfast, I had it for lunch, I had it for dinner! *(Laughter.)* I wouldn't go out of the apartment because I was so *scared*. All you hear upstate is how *awful* New York City is, you know, like you're going to get mugged as soon as you walk across the street.

DWIGHT: *Of course the only news reports you get are the bad ones.*

DAWN: Exactly, exactly, so I was *petrified*. It took me a long time to get over that. And I'm still afraid to be alone at night walking the streets, I won't do it. So it was a big big thing.

DWIGHT: *How long was it from the time that you moved to the time that you started working for Marvel?*

DAWN: Let's see, we got married January 26th, we moved here in early February, I started working here around April or May.

DWIGHT: *What do you enjoy most of all the different things you've done at Marvel?*

DAWN: Designing, definitely designing. I majored in advertising and that's where I want to go, that's the direction I want to take, so designing is definitely what I aspire to do, what I enjoy doing.

DWIGHT: *Of the stuff that you've designed for Marvel what have you enjoyed most, or felt was your best work?*

DAWN: *(Pause.)* Let me put it this way, a lot of editors at Marvel feel that *they* are designers, I don't really have the leeway *to* design. All of the editors that I've

The (Bob) Peak-ish work of Sienkiewicz, from Miller's limited-series ELEKTRA: Assassin.

"They do that a lot in this business, run an idea to death."

worked with either have their own ideas of what they want, or tell me specifically on how they want something done. I have yet to start from the ground level and say, "This is my idea," and show it to them.

DWIGHT: *But you are getting closer in that respect with MARVEL AGE now.*

DAWN: Yeah, oh definitely. I'm beginning to get the feeling of actually sinking my teeth into something. I feel much better about that because before it was like they weren't my designs, I was just doing layouts.

DWIGHT: *What would you like to be able to do in MARVEL AGE in the future? How would you like to change its look?*

DAWN: Hm. I wouldn't get so standardized. I know it's a magazine and it's got to look the same just so people know where to go to and stuff like that, but like for the "Marvel Age of Whatever" —

DWIGHT: *The column that recaps the history of Marvel Comics.*

DAWN: Like the one that I'm doing now I enlarged a part of one of the past covers, and I like that. It's not *just* here's another article where you just put a cover here, a cover there, and there's no creativity there at all. You know, you don't need me to do that, you could get anybody else to do that.

DWIGHT: *You'd be surprised.* (Laughter.) *Are any of the editors more receptive to your input or do they all just come up and say they want this, this, this and this?*

DAWN: Some are and some aren't, it depends on the editor. **Carl Potts,** for instance, will give you the exact font, exactly where he wants it, how the color should be, a whole layout, use this picture, blow it up 75% or whatever. He'll exactly tell you *everything* so it's basically doing a mechanical, you don't do any design at all. **Terry Kavanagh** lets you have more freedom because — I'm not sure — but I don't think that he is an artist per se, I think he's strictly a writer. Me, I enjoy working with just the writer/editors rather than the artist/writer/editors, because it tends to get a little stale after awhile, the same look.

You know, I love to see new things come out rather than just see the same old thing. Like for instance **Robbin Brosterman** did some torn paper for ELEKTRA: ASSASSIN and that has been *used* and overkilled like crazy — Carl is now using it for THE PUNISHER, I see DC using it like crazy. You know, they do that a lot in this business, they run it to death, an idea. I like to see exciting things, when you open the page it's not, "Oh, here's another thing that somebody over here designed."

DWIGHT: *"Oh, I know where they got this from."*

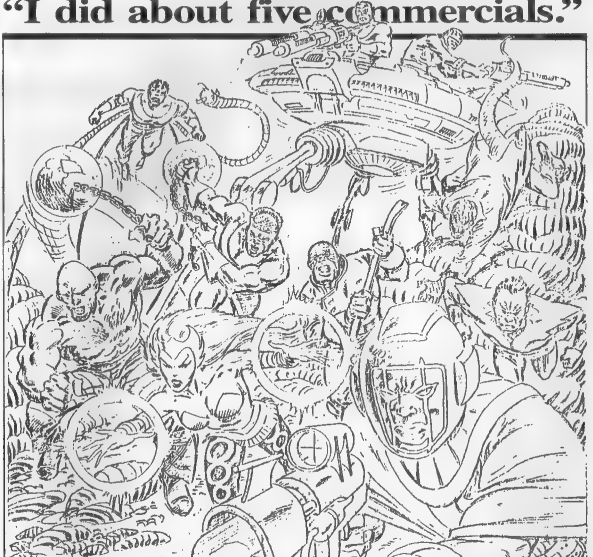
DAWN: Right, I'm sick of that.

DWIGHT: *What would you like to tell Jim Salicrup in print about MARVEL AGE?* (Laughter.)

DAWN: Well, to get his section in on time, maybe that should be the *first* article that I receive instead of the very last. *(Laughter.)* That's the biggest problem that I have with Jim. He is one of those editors that is creative and has his own ideas, so I do pretty much what he tells me. He gives me a little freedom here and there but they're not totally my ideas.

DWIGHT: *You said that Bill Sienkiewicz is the artist that you really like, is there any other artist that really catches your eye?*

"I did about five commercials."



Pencils from SECRET WARS, a series that caused more than its share of "All hands on deck". Artwork by Mike Zeck.

DAWN: A lot of the artists aren't consistent. I'll look through a whole book and I'll like a page here or a page there, but it doesn't seem too consistent. I know deadlines are terrible, but I don't see any jobs as a whole that make me say, "Wow, that's terrific!" I don't see it unless it's something like a limited series where a person has been working on it for awhile, or a graphic novel or something like that. But the monthly things, I think it's really difficult for these creators to pull it off each month, you know — especially the artists who are working on three or four books.

DWIGHT: *You can turn into a machine.*

DAWN: Yeah, yeah.

DWIGHT: *Besides MARVEL AGE what other things do you work on regularly that you actually have an influence in as far as design?*

DAWN: Well, occasionally an editor *will* come up to me for an inside-front or an inside-back cover, needing their contents page designed —

DWIGHT: *Ads?*

DAWN: Ads, no. I'd *love* to do ads but I think our department is strictly just the comic books — anything more I think might get a little bit crazy.

DWIGHT: *Right, you have so many things involved in the regular production work of the comics.*

DAWN: Sure, and the thing is that, like today, there was a big push to get three books out today. All of us, it's called an "all hands on deck," everybody stops what their doing and does balloon paste-ups. *That* happens quite a bit, too, so it's not like I just do design. I do just about anything they ask me to do. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *It must have been really crazy when Marvel had so many of the books coming out once every two weeks.*

DAWN: Yeah, oh yeah, yep. It was even crazier when I first started working here. I don't know what happened but during SECRET WARS time we had so *many* pages coming in — probably because it was such a late book — that it was *always* "all hands on deck." I remember **Ron**

"The one that sticks out most was a leather two-

Zalme just going, "All hands on deck! Everybody *stop* what their doing!" You don't hear that too much anymore. It does happen but not as regularly as it used to.

DWIGHT: *You make personal appearances occasionally in costume, what's that like? Tell us about some of those adventures.*

DAWN: Oh, that's so much fun! It's like being another person. You're in disguise, nobody can see your face, you can get as crazy as you want to be, do whatever you want. I used to model and I *missed* the attention from an audience, and you get it with the little kids coming up to you, and signing autographs — it's a lot of fun, I really enjoy it.

DWIGHT: *Now you were at the bachelor party —*

DAWN: Right, as Firestar.

DWIGHT: *Tell us about that event.*

DAWN: Oh, it was a little skit that we had to do —

DWIGHT: *This is "Peter Parker's" bachelor party.* (Laughter.) *At the Toy Building wasn't it?*

DAWN: Right. **Jim Shooter** devised a little skit for a bunch of us, and we had to rehearse it and stuff, and act it out. **Hector Collazo** was Iceman and I was Firestar. It was a lot of fun, we just acted out the play and stuff, and then we mingled with all of the merchandise people. I would have liked to have played Mary Jane, though. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *And you made a convention appearance, didn't you, up in the Northeast?*

DAWN: No, it wasn't at a convention, it was at a toy company, Tons of Toys. What they do is they hire out a bunch of actors, and **Barbara Maier** had trouble finding people so she asked me if I could help out, and I said, "Sure, why not?" So they fly you up there and you go in the store and you sign autographs and stuff.

DWIGHT: *I heard the flight turned into a bit of an adventure.*

DAWN: Oh, yeah, it was lots of fun. It was not quite the dead of winter, before Christmas, and the flight coming home — though actually the flight going out there was pretty bad; first they had no record of me, then we got on and it was delayed, it was cancelled. Then they had bad weather, we weren't even going to be able to get off the ground, and then they opened it up just for our flight. We were up in the air for a lot of time and then they finally put us down someplace else — I don't even remember where that was — and then we had to drive all the way to our hotel.

Then coming back was even worse, one of these eight-seater little jobs, you know. *(Laughter.)* I was sitting right behind the pilot and you can see out because it's all glass, and it started *raining!* Everybody thought, "Oh, great." Then all of a sudden it started coming down *harder!* You know, I'm getting really scared because the plane is going back and forth, back and forth, and it does turn your stomach a bit! *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *Where's that dramamine?*

DAWN: Yeah! And then the guy sitting next to the pilot, he was one of the passengers, he was having a ball saying, "Oh, this is great, this is great, this is *hail*, we're in a hailstorm!" I'm like, *"What!"*

FIRESTAR . . . one of Dawn's "other" secret identies.

Photos: © 1998 D. Geiger

piece thing for . . . for after hours, let's say."

(Laughter.) Here I am in this little —

CHRIS IVY: Psycho-pilot.

DAWN: No, it wasn't even the pilot! And yeah, it was coming down, and then the *lightning* started! I was freaking out. The guy that played Spider-Man was sitting next to me and he . . . he couldn't believe it, he was all pale, he was worse off than I was. *(Laughter.)* I think he was praying, too. Well, we were reaching La Gaurdia and I found out later on that we almost hit a larger aircraft because I guess we were small and undetected with all of the other things that were picking up on the radar screen — and we almost *missed* the runway!

DWIGHT: *And LaGuardia is right on the edge of Long Island Sound, that could have been quite interesting.*

DAWN: I know, I'm glad I didn't know it at the time. The guy sitting next to the pilot was *telling* me all of this later — it's a good thing I wasn't sitting up front because I think I would have passed out or something. *(Laughter.)* I swore that I would never fly in a little plane like that again, in the wintertime or bad weather or whatever. That is my tale. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *You mentioned that you did some modeling, up in Buffalo, right?*

DAWN: Mm-hm

DWIGHT: *Do you ever like glance through the SPIDER-MAN books, since Mary Jane is a model, and . . . is what they have Mary Jane doing essentially accurate?*

DAWN: I don't really look through too many comic books. *(Laughter.)* But she's a high fashion model, I never got that far. I was, you know, the local girl in Buffalo. I wasn't big at all. I did about five local commercials and I did some runway, but it wasn't the high fashion thing that Mary Jane does.

DWIGHT: *What kind of stuff did you model?*

DAWN: Lingerie.

DWIGHT: *Oh! Are we going to be able to run photos?* (Laughter.)

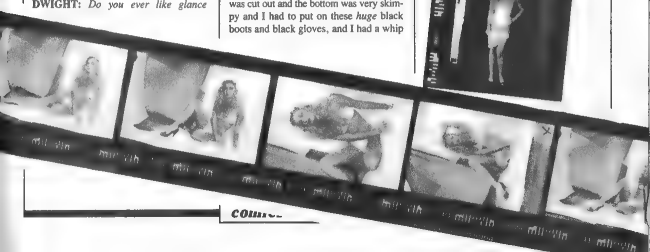
DAWN: If you want, sure. I don't mind, I'm not modest. *(Laughter.)*

CHRIS: Can I take the pictures? *(Laughter.)*

DAWN: They're already taken, I have a portfolio of them.

DWIGHT: *Well bring 'em in, we'll select what we like.* (Laughter.) *When you were modeling was there at any time an outfit that you had second thoughts about wearing?*

DAWN: Sure, the one that sticks out most in my mind was a leather two-piece thing for . . . for after hours let's say. The top was cut out and the bottom was very skimpy and I had to put on these *huge* black boots and black gloves, and I had a whip



"I do just about anything they (Marvel) ask me to do."

and a dog bone. *(Laughter.)* And I had to put pasties on because I *wasn't* going to go out there fully exposed. So I had this guy that worked for a radio station help me with this —

DWIGHT: *What a tough job.*

DAWN: A skit I mean, he was like a heavy metal maniac, so we did a little skit where I fed him the bone. I had fun. After I got over the shock of putting that thing on it was fun.

DWIGHT: *Okay, I think we got their attention with that!* (Laughter.) *Does Steve use you as a model?*

DAWN: I would.have to say he uses my clothes more than anything else. He'll go through my wardrobe and say, "Oh, this'll be great for this — oh yeah, I'll use this."

DWIGHT: *He'll just hang it up and draw from that, not ask you to put it on?*

DAWN: No, he knows what I look like when I put it on.

CHRIS: I've seen you on a HULK cover, though.

DAWN: A HULK cover?

CHRIS: You were on a HULK cover.

DAWN: Well, I guess he does draw me, unconsciously he probably does.

CHRIS: But he just does it without you posing, just does it without letting you know.

DAWN: The only time — he's now working for Continuity Graphics — he has me now posing for Samuree. He brought home this big sword and I was posing for him. "Wow, this is great, you really *look* like Samuree!" *(Laughter.)* So he wants to do a whole photo session now. But I think he feels that it is beneficial — I mean hey, there's a live model right in your own home, why not use her.

DWIGHT: *You know how to pose, how to hold a pose and everything.*

DAWN: Right.

DWIGHT: *In the time you've been working for Marvel how have you seen the industry change?*

DAWN: Ooo, big change, very big change. There is a big difference, I feel, with the way it's going. Just from what I know was done in the past to what they're doing now: in the past they treated comic books as a means for teaching kids something. Kids don't read the newspaper, they read comic books, so *through* the comic books they can learn what's going on — I don't see that happening now. All I see is fantasy, I don't see real issues, and I think that's sad because that's a big loss — for children not to have that as they're growing up. I think it's too bad.

I mean I think it's great that, you know, they can get off into the fantasy and stuff like that, but I would like to see a few more books going into the direction of some political statements. Why not? They did it in the '70s, they did it in the '60s, why not the '80s? Why not the '90s? Why are we so limited in going into this superhero all of the time, going on all of these little excursions? Why aren't we saying something about today's people, making a statement? Are these writers and creators *scared* of doing that? I don't know. Is it political, is it a no-no, is the Comics Code saying you can't do that anymore? I think it's sad, I really do.

DWIGHT: *What do you see yourself doing in the next few years?*

DAWN: Hopefully I would like to get back into advertising, that's my love. I love to create, I love to design. Eventually — I don't know if this is too unrealistic, this is just a dream of mine — but I would love to be an account executive in an advertising firm. That's my ultimate goal. But I'm too young for that. In that kind of business to start off you have to be about 30, as a woman, to be respected, and then as you get older they respect you even more. It's pretty sad but that's the way it is, so I guess I'm a little too young for that stuff right now. *(Laughter.)*

LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

YOU HAVE TO DRAW THE LINE CONCERNING FREEDOM (?)

Dear COMICS INTERVIEW,

I beg to disagree with **Henry Vogel**'s editorial in COMICS INTERVIEW #63. In particular, I feel that he is wrong in his opinion on handguns. He seemed to suggest that fifty thousand deaths by cars should be legislated against before ten thousand handgun deaths are. First off, I think that many "people who are so concerned with saving human life" are "trying to have car control laws passed." Car control laws include things such as speed limits and the fact that cars must come equipped with seat belts. Some people are trying to legislate mandatory air bags. Secondly, as far as I know, the vast majority of people killed in car accidents are car users. The same is not true with handgun deaths.

Mr. Vogel also seems to ignore that one of the reasons ten thousand handgun deaths is such an atrocious figure is that it is way out of line when compared to other countries. And the laws that keep handgun related deaths down in other countries are not necessarily strict. When I hear the National Rifle Association arguing against tighter registration laws, that gets me frustrated. Are they trying to even prevent the capturing of people who kill with handguns?

I do agree with **Mr. Vogel** that "FREEDOM IS NOT SAFE." I do feel, however, that you have to draw the line concerning freedom. Someone's freedom to carry a gun, and someone else's freedom not to get blown away with that gun. I am not in favor of all legislation designed for greater safety, but I feel that some is necessary.

Matthew J. Daube
50 Scarborough Rd.
Manchester, CT 06030-5431

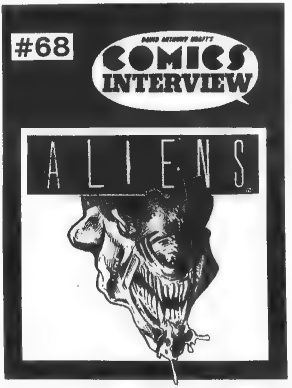
I'm a little confused with your position concerning my editorial. First you say you "disagree" with my editorial but later you say you agree that freedom is not safe. Considering that was the entire point of the editorial, does this mean you do or do not agree with me?

Be that as it may, your major point of disagreement was my position on handguns — particularly the point where I compared fatalities caused with cars to those caused with handguns. First off, my point was NOT that legislation should be enacted against cars. Car control laws bother me quite a bit, also. When I get into my car I am accepting the risk that I may be in an accident while driving. I am accepting the risk that someone whom I have no control over at all will come out of nowhere and smash into my car. I am accepting the risk that I may be killed or maimed even though I did nothing wrong. By the simple fact that I drive the car I am declaring that I consider that risk to be worth the benefits I receive from driving the car.

Also, you're probably correct in assuming that the majority of people killed in car accidents are car users. You may even be correct in assuming that the same is not true concerning handgun deaths. So what? Your argument implies it is not as bad to be killed by an object you use yourself. That would lead us to the conclusion that there are two categories of handgun deaths: those who are handgun users — which aren't so bad — and those who are not handgun users — which are quite bad. This most likely is not what you intended, but it is what you implied.

I'll readily admit that many other countries have far fewer handgun-related deaths. But if your primary concern is safety — such that you are willing to give up freedom to achieve that safety — then why not move to one of these countries? I have nowhere else I can go to achieve the level of freedom I have here (though I still believe we have too many restrictions on freedom here, too) while you have many, many places you may go to achieve the level of "safety" you wish. But if you choose to stay and pursue that safety here I ask you this: who gave you the right to restrict MY freedom just so YOU can feel safe?

Henry Vogel



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